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**Understanding the lives of older women :
Adjustment in later life**

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Declaration

The research described herein was conducted by the author at the Department of Nursing Studies, the University of Edinburgh, between the dates of October 1994 and July 2001. It is the author's original work and unless specific reference is made to the contrary. None of the work described herein has been submitted for a degree at any other institution.

Victoria Traynor

Abstract

Understanding the lives of older women : Adjustment in later life

This thesis focuses on understanding the lives of older women and explaining adjustment in later life. The theoretical perspective of existentialism framed the qualitative approach used to carry out the research. The data are derived from in-depth interviews with older women (ranging from 60 to 89 years) and participant observation at two day centres for older people. The grounded theory approach of concurrent data collection and data analysis was adopted drawing on the work of Glaser & Strauss (1967). Audio-taped interviews and daily fieldnotes recorded contrasting stories of women struggling with adjustment in later life with those of women enjoying a successful old age. These contrasts were found to be evident regardless of the women's circumstances.

Some women who faced a challenge to the meaning and purpose of their lives managed successful adjustment when others struggled with adjustment and some experienced depression. Understanding about these contrasting experiences is provided by the three major categories which emerged as the most significant aspects of adjustment in later life among older women : *explaining depression*; *intimacy in the lives of older women*; and *managing change in later life*. A core category of *searching for meaning* was discovered and is used to show that women engaged in a common process to make sense of their lives and the outcome of their search affected adjustment in later life. The relationship between the major categories is explained through the properties of the core category and serves to explain how the search for meaning affects adjustment in later life. The interaction between the major categories determines whether the woman's life makes sense and structures her *adjustment work* in later life.

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Glossary of styles used for recording data

Participants' names

Each participant in the research has been given a pseudonym. During the research the participants called me by my first name and I called them by their first name and, in the main, the pseudonyms follow this pattern. I wanted to distinguish the in-depth interview data these from the day-to-day interactions which were observed at the day centres, therefore the women who took part in in-depth interviews are given pseudonyms of Mrs A, Miss B, Mrs C and so on.

Scots language

The in-depth interviews which were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim record the Scots language used by the participants but extracts from the participant observation and interview data which were not audio-taped do not record Scots language. It was not possible to accurately record this in the fieldnotes from memory.

Transcription symbols

| | |
|------------|---|
| UPPER CASE | The use of upper case letters reflects an emphasis. |
| [... // | Participants speaking at the same time. |
| (.....) | A pause which lasts as many seconds as there are typed full-stops inside the brackets. Pauses less than four seconds were not in the transcripts. |
| [....] | <i>Brackets contain extra information about an interaction which is not immediately evident from the taped conversation alone.</i> |
| ... | In the thesis some data is edited and this is indicated by three full stops. |
| [...] | Square brackets enclosing three bold full stops indicates a section of conversation which is missing because it was not clearly audible from a taped interview. |

Source : Silverman, David (1993) *Interpreting Qualitative Data : Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction* London : Sage Publications and Ochs, Elinor (1979) Transcriptions as theory in : Ochs, Elinor & Schieffelin, Bambi, B. (Eds.) *Developmental Pragmatics* New York : Academic Press

Introduction

Studying the Lives of Older Women

The original ideas for this study come from my interest in women's health. In the early stages of the literature review it was evident that there was a lack of research exploring the lives of older women. Until recently, issues of gender and ageing have not been explored either within the gerontology or women's studies literature (Gibson, 1996). The lives of older women have been invisible to gerontologists and feminists alike. Gerontology is a relatively new discipline, and initially research into the lives of older people focused on understanding the meaning of retirement from paid work. This focus provided insight into men's experiences of retirement and tended to ignore women's old age (Bernard & Meade, 1993). Some studies began with an assumption that because the work which women do in the home continues indefinitely women do not experience the sense of purposelessness which men can experience following retirement (Cumming and Henry, 1961).

Some seminal studies included the perspectives of older women in their findings, for example Townsend's (1957) study of family life among older people and Abrams' (1978) work. In the main, it was not until recently that women's experiences became an integral aspect of ageing studies, as it is in work which explores the lives of younger adults. Today edited books focusing on women's experiences of ageing and gender in later life are published (Bernard & Meade, 1993; Turner, 1994; Arber & Ginn, 1995) and conference programmes include dedicated sessions on the experiences of older women. Gerontological research no longer focuses on the losses of retirement and rather the impact of changing social roles in the domestic and public sphere is being acknowledged in the lives of older women and men.

Women's studies have lagged behind gerontology and the gender interests generated by the feminist gerontologists (Gibson, 1996). Feminist researchers who explored old age have tended to do work which challenges the invisibility of gender within the caring literature and thus focused on the *burden of old age*. A few women's studies have discussed the feminist perspectives on ageing. MacDonald & Rich's (1984) discussion of the role of older women in the women's movement and Ford & Sinclair's (1987) study on women's experiences of retirement remain rare pieces of work on old

age which the women's press have published. The nursing and social care literature on ageing also continues to neglect women's experiences. Evers (1981) found that older women's experiences in continuing care units was not as positive as it was for men and recently a paper by Bernard (1998) challenged the continuing lack of understanding about older women's experiences within nursing.

Choosing to focus on *older* women's experiences for this study fitted in with my nursing background of working with older people. From my experience in continuing care units I was aware that when faced with adverse circumstances some women could not manage a happy old age. The thesis which has been developed from this study explores why it is that some older women manage to adjust successfully in old age whereas others do not. The *aim of the study* is to : *compare how some women adjust positively, sometimes despite difficult circumstances, in later life when others become overwhelmed by life and do not enjoy their old age.* Some of those who do not manage a successful old age experience depressive illness. Quantitative studies have provided understanding about depression in later life. These studies present findings about significant factors which can be assessed to predict individuals' experiences to a particular set of circumstances. However, findings from these quantitative studies do not explain why it is that when the risk factors are present individuals do not react in the predicted way.

In the study presented in this thesis, a qualitative approach was adopted to explore why some older women enjoy their old age when others become overwhelmed with life and find it a daily struggle. In Chapter One, the scene of the thesis is set with a discussion of the background literature on the theories of ageing. In Chapter Two, there is a discussion of the grounded theory approach which is the research method adopted for data collection and data analysis in this thesis. In Chapter Three, there is a description of the research design and a discussion about the practical issues of carrying out the research. In Chapter Four, the main theme of the thesis *searching for meaning* is presented using a core category to explain its significance to adjustment in later life among older women. The chapter is used to show how a relationship between the major categories interacts through the core category to affect adjustment in later life. In Chapter Five, the data analysis is presented to illustrate the three major categories of *explaining depression; intimacy in the lives of older women; and managing change in later life* which were the most significant aspects of adjustment in later life among the

older women who participated in the study. In Conclusion, there is a discussion of the thesis' relevance to the gerontological literature, the research method, and the implications of the findings to current nursing practice and social policy.

Chapter One

Background Literature

Later life is a time of change and adjustment to new roles and circumstances is necessary is to adapt positively in old age. The focus of this thesis is understanding adjustment in old age and how older people make sense of their lives and find meaning in changing life circumstances. Understanding the existential questions which older people find satisfactory answers to, or struggle with, is emerging as a significant task within gerontological research (Biggs, 1993). In this chapter, the disengagement theory and lifespan development theory of ageing are placed beside the existential perspective as ways of understanding the experience of ageing. In the gerontology literature, it has been shown that the disengagement theory and lifespan development theory have influenced significantly the way in which old age is perceived. Critiques illustrate that the view presented in these theories is limited because the social context of older people have been neglected. Existential philosophy is presented as a more meaningful perspective to understand the experience of ageing. In this chapter, it will be shown how the existential perspective provides a framework to understand the significance of subjective being in the world and therefore it is appropriate for exploring the lives of older women.

When does old age begin?

First, in a thesis about adjustment in *old age* it is useful to start with a discussion about when old age begins because although age is a biological characteristic it is a subjectively experienced social phenomenon. In Western societies, people are described as being old when they reach the official retirement age (Townsend, 1981) and demographic profiles of older populations illustrate that old age is marked in official statistics by a chronological retirement age. The term *pensionable age* was created at the beginning of the century by Bismarck and Lloyd George to determine the receipt of army pensions and has become a determinant for the beginning of old age (Mann, 1995). This implies that the year when a person becomes old shifts with changes in social policy. For example, in the UK in the next twenty years, women and men will retire at the same age and women will no longer be officially old before men are.

Old age is described as starting after retirement because old age is a chronological period just as middle age and adolescence is but individuals' experiences of old age are in contrast to these externally defined labels. In a study by Thompson et al. (1990) it was found that older people themselves do not regard these official markers as indicating the beginning of old age. Thompson et al. (1990) adopted a qualitative approach to study the experiences of later life. Older people were interviewed about their memories of the previous generation of older family members, along with activities, feelings, and relationships in the present. All the participants were grandparents, and their children and grandchildren were interviewed. There were 55 participants and the participants ranged from 60 to 87 years. The study revealed that scarcely any of the participants *feel old* or *think of themselves as old* when perceptions of their self do not match stereotypical negative images of ageing. It was not until illness and frailty were experienced that the participants described themselves and others as old. The findings were common among women and men; those who were in the chronologically younger elderly group and the very elderly group; and between different socioeconomic groups. Thompson et al. (1990) found that for individuals, the start of old age is inseparable from negative expectations about the experience of being old and old age was not associated with chronological age. Thompson (1993; p. 668) explains :

[t]he fundamental which we have learnt from our informants is in our title ["I don't feel old"]. Unless they are physically ill, or depressed, they do not feel in their real selves, that they are old. ... To succeed, older men and women have to draw on their full resources built over a lifetime. They have to fight against the stereotypes of dependence to maintain their own sense of independence, purpose and meaning in life. ... The old to them – as to many social scientists – are typified by the dependent inmates or members of such institutions; they will call them "old" even when chronologically younger than themselves.

Older people who experience good health tend not to *feel their age*, whereas older people who experience frailty accept negative stereotypes about what it means to be old. Thompson et al. (1990) found that physical decline was inherent in descriptions of old age. Older people internalise negative stereotyping of old age although it does not match their experience (Sidell, 1995). Consequently, they rate their health high when they do not experience the expected pattern of increasing frailty and social isolation. When older people internalise the negative images of ageing they do not

have high expectations for old age. Thompson (1993; p. 689) summarises what the expectations of ageing are, and contrasts these with not feeling old in later life :

[f]eeling old is feeling exhausted in spirit, lacking the energy to find new responses as life changes. It is giving up. Feeling ourselves means feeling the inner energy which has our own pasts as part of our present. It means feeling a whole person.

The young-old

Neugarten (1974) has attempted to resolve the contradictions between the negative perceptions of old age and the positive experiences of older people themselves. She has identified a group of *young-old* who are between 55 and 75 and are fitter and have greater access to material resources than any previous groups of older people in Western societies. The young-old are chronologically elderly but challenge stereotypical images of old people because they are physically and socially active. Many people now stop work before the official retirement age and so the boundary between when retirement and old age begins has changed. Retirement is no longer age defined but determined by personal choice, health status, and the economic requirements of employers and employees (Neugarten, 1974).

Neugarten (1974) distinguishes the young-old from the *old-old* who are over 75, experience more ill-health, and are less active than those between 55 and 75 years. After 75, health declines (Sidell, 1995) and material resources reduce as life savings begin to be used up (Walker, 1993). A distinction is made between the young-old and old-old because their experiences of ageing contrast. After 75, older people are more likely to become dependant and their experiences of old age are more likely to match the stereotypical images of ageing. It is after this age that older people's experiences of old age match their expectations and they are more likely to say, "I feel old". The experiences of the young-old group challenge the stereotypical images of ageing and illustrate that old age might not begin until after 75, with the years between 55 and 75 being a continuation of middle-age (Neugarten, 1974).

Gender in later life

Gender has an impact on the changes experienced in later life and adjustment to these changes, and as explained in the Introduction, gender issues in ageing have been a neglected area of work and understanding about the lives of older women is a

relatively new area. A brief outline of gender issues relevant to ageing is presented here to put in a social context the lives of the older women who took part in the research presented here. Arber & Ginn's (1991) work has challenged a previous neglect of the experiences of women in late life by demonstrating the impact of gender on the social position of older women and men. In general, the theories of ageing have not acknowledged the impact of gender in later life (Bernard & Meade, 1993). In particular, theories exploring adjustment in old age have neglected gender which is a mirror of what occurred in theories exploring psychological development in younger age groups (Heidrich, 1994).

Gender and retirement

Before the recent feminist studies on ageing, the gerontology literature focused on the impact of men leaving paid employment because if adequate preparation for retirement was not made their public and career orientated jobs resulted in a significant loss. As a consequence, employers have begun to provide pre-retirement courses to support the transition from work to retirement. The focus within the research has now changed, and studies are beginning to explore the impact on the lives of older women of men entering the domestic world full-time after retirement (Ashkam, 1995). Tensions will arise when both partners spend more time at home than anywhere else, if a balance within the home cannot be negotiated and maintained. Townsend (1981) emphasises the need for this re-orientation in research, by explaining that men retire from their paid work at a pre-defined age but women continue their unpaid caring and domestic roles until physically unable to do so.

Women's and men's working history has changed over this century (Groves, 1993) and these changes will be reflected within women's and men's experiences of retirement, with a knock-on effect on their domestic roles. Various factors such as different cultures and individual family patterns established before retirement will impact on the experience of retirement and research studies are now exploring the significance of the domestic sphere on the experiences of ageing (Arber & Ginn, 1995). Bernard et al. (1995) explain that the gendered nature of work has an affect on the retirement experiences of older women. They explain that women's experiences of retirement are affected by workplace socialisation which is mediated by a history of low paid low status work :

[r]esearch has shown that these [workplace] structures and experiences are undoubtedly decisive in terms of the reproduction of financial inequalities in retirement (Arber & Ginn, 1991), but they are also likely to influence wider issues concerning the marginalisation of older women and their ability to take control of their lives (Bernard & Meade, 1993).

Bernard et al. (1995; p. 56)

Older women's experiences of retirement are less likely to reflect those of the *young-old* because their working history has not promoted the image of a well-deserved retirement as a period to spend an occupational pension and to do activities which have been put off while a career was established and maintained. Women's working history restricts their access to a pension and their low status employment does not engender an anticipation of retirement from a physically hard working career. Traditionally, women's retirement from domestic duties is not likely to occur unless paid help is bought into the home. Whereas, men choose either to help with domestic duties for the first time or continue a lifelong pattern of taking part in domestic duties. Men's retirement from paid employment is a recognised developmental stage which is well-earned, but women's retirement is not perceived in the same way. The significance of these gender issues illustrates the social context of women's experiences of ageing compared to men's. The issues women are concerned with in later life are therefore different from those concerning men.

Successful ageing

In the discussions above the beginning of old age and the impact of gender on ageing were discussed. In this section, the discussion continues with a critique of some of the social psychological theories which attempt to understand and explain the ageing process. The later years are associated with an increased chance of experiencing a particular set of circumstances which result in life changes. Retirement, bereavement, and the development of health problems are perceived as an expected part of *old age*, and are described as markers which typify old age. Gerontology and lifespan development theories suggest how *successful ageing* is achieved when these changes are experienced. The theories explain the way individuals adapt to and manage the changes associated with ageing. Two theories will be focused on in this discussion of the theories of ageing. The disengagement theory is included because it has been influential within social policy development (Coleman, 1988) and the lifespan

development theory is included because it is one of the few psychological theories which has explicitly explored the process of ageing in later life (Coleman, 1993a).

The social construction theory of ageing

First, the social construction theory of ageing is presented because it sets out the social context of ageing for older people within Western societies. Townsend (1981) explains that *old age* is a socially constructed phenomenon determined more by social policy than the effects of the experiences described as typical of ageing. Successful ageing not only manifests itself in individual ways of managing change but is also determined by changes which are socially constructed. Townsend (1981) explains that enforced retirement reduces individuals' access to income and increases the risk of experiencing poverty in later life. This increased risk of experiencing poverty in later life reduces individuals' chances of experiencing *successful ageing* because of its affect on health; opportunities for social activities; access to transport; housing status; and so on. The social factor of gender influences the experience of ageing and effects the life experience of older women and men. For example, comparing health and social service provision between older women and men with similar levels of disability or caring for someone with similar levels of dependence. It is found that men receive higher levels of support than women (Arber & Ginn, 1991).

Townsend's (1981) social construction theory and Arber & Ginn's (1991) study of gender in later life, show that social factors effect the experience of ageing and therefore individual choices are made within the limits of these social contexts. In this chapter, the theories of ageing are critiqued within a social context. Understanding about ageing is explored by reflecting on the possibility of *successful ageing* within the social context of our society. The ageing theories are criticised for ignoring these social constraints. For example, the activity theory suggests that successful ageing can be achieved by maintaining the activity patterns and values typical of middle age. It thus attempts to idealise the potential of old age and presents impossible standards which are derived from the exceptional (Bond et al., 1993). Bond et al. (1993) explain that the activity theory ignores the social structure of society which prevents the older worker from maintaining a major activity of middle age, namely *productive* employment. Townsend's (1981) social construction approach recognises the structural limits on the experiences of old age and challenges the individual's potential

to experience successful ageing. The theory contextualises the experience of old age within current social policy.

Disengagement theory

Cumming & Henry (1961) presented a theory of ageing which is perceived as being controversial. The theory is derived from a longitudinal study carried out with physically fit older people from Kansas City. There were 172 participants between 50 and 70 years, and 107 between 70 and 90 years (with similar numbers of women and men in both groups). Their findings suggested that older people *disengage with society* as part of a preparatory process before death, because as death approaches it would be dysfunctional to die in the *middle of something* (Fennell et al., 1988). Their work was controversial because it supported negative stereotypes about ageing and provided support for promoting the rocking chair lifestyle for older people. Cumming & Henry's (1961) analysis found that older people contentedly disengage from society. However, they did not question whether people learnt to accept this situation or would have preferred to find ways of continuing their involvement with society. Their theory also ignores the young-old group because the theory presumes that all older people are purposively preparing for death by disengaging from society, but the young-old are no more significantly closer to death than middle-aged adults are.

Hughes (1990) suggests that one of the research techniques used by Cumming & Henry (1961) restricts the generalisability of the theory to understand the ageing process. The problematic technique was a sampling method called *snowballing* (Cumming & Henry (1961) refer to this technique as the *bush fire* method). The idea behind a snowball sample is that the researcher begins with a small group of participants and asks them for additional contacts, so the potential sample size expands geometrically as it rolls along (Hughes, 1990). A risk associated with this technique is an unwanted bias in the sample. In Cumming & Henry's (1961) study, friends recommended each other with the consequence that the results developed a bias through self-recruitment of middle-class *disengagers*. Although the methods were flawed, in America in the 1960s, this study was the most powerful theory to emerge on what constitutes the characteristics of successful ageing (Hughes, 1990). Cumming & Henry's (1961) study provided evidence to support the *rocking chair* image of old age, which continues to be an acceptable image of old age. Policy decisions have been influenced by this view which in turn have perpetuated a passive view of old age

(Coleman, 1988). Policy makers support the development of housing and care homes which facilitate older people's disengagement from society, and in the main housing for older people is still not integrated into local communities (Bond, 1993). Policy makers use this theory to justify decisions which perpetuate older people's enforced withdraw from their social world. Gerontologists have critiqued this theory and shown how it is based on assumptions about how older people adapt to their changing social world and they no longer accept that older people contentedly disengage from society.

Lifespan development theory

The lifespan developmental theory is one of the few perspectives in developmental psychology which considers old age (Coleman, 1993a). Erik Erikson was one of the precursors of this perspective (Bond et al., 1993). Theories such as Erikson's demonstrate the possibility of development in old age not previously recognised (Slater, 1995). In a review of the theories of ageing, Bond et al. (1993; p. 29) considered Erikson's lifespan development theory, "a fruitful context for the study of the psychology of ageing". Erikson developed a framework for the whole lifespan in terms of a series of tasks to be performed. Eight stages of growth are identified from birth to maturity with a list of traits which indicate *healthy* or *pathological* personality patterns for each stage and a list of tasks to be fulfilled to reach each stage of development (Sidell, 1995).

The last task of development is to achieve *ego integrity* when life has meaning and order, resulting in an "acceptance of one's one and only life cycle as something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted of no substitutions" (Erikson, 1965; p. 260). Achievement of ego integrity is an assured sense of meaning and order in life and the universe, as against *despair* and *disgust* (Bond et al., 1993). Bond et al. (1993) explain that despair might be expressed as a feeling that one has failed and does not have time to attempt another life or alternative road to integrity, and also a disgust in other people, especially the young. Erikson (1965; p. 242) explains that despair is manifest in a realisation of the finality of life and is experienced if individuals do not become reconciled with the life they have led :

[d]espair expresses the feeling that the time is now short, too short for the attempt to start another life and to try out alternate roads to integrity. Disgust hides despair, if only after in the form of "a thousand little disgusts" which do not add up to one big remorse.

The extract above illustrates how Erikson perceives older individuals' psychological well-being if they do not manage to integrate a life time's experience. Despair results if an older person cannot accept that their life is their one and only life. Erikson explains that to experience psychological well-being an older person must achieve ego integrity by integrating life long experiences and accept the pathways they have taken over a life time.

Bond et al. (1993) explain that it is this emphasis on the integrity of the lifespan which is Erikson's lasting contribution and one that is vital to understanding old age. To understand people it is necessary to see them in the context of their whole life history with problems successfully and unsuccessfully resolved from earlier periods. The lifespan development approach focuses attention on the whole life and provides a model of how to understand later life. Bond et al. (1993) suggest that Erikson's work is sometimes misrepresented as a theory about a set of tasks to achieve integrity. Rather, it is a model of how to understand ageing. Bond et al. (1993) explain that there is a lack of empirical work in this area but this should not result in a disregard for Erikson's approach because it is a model for understanding development not a theory about development.

Biggs (1993) critiques this analysis of the impact of Erikson's work on understanding the experience of ageing in later life. He explains that current theories of ageing reject the developmental emphasis of Erikson's work. Individuals' lives are not neatly divided into detectable developmental stages and the resolution of emotional difficulties is ongoing and does not have to be complete. Bond et al. (1993) would suggest that Biggs' (1993) criticism is unnecessary because Erikson does not suggest that the completion of emotional difficulties is necessary for development and older people are made up of a history of successful and unsuccessful challenges to their integrity. It could be suggested that in criticising Erikson, Biggs (1993) exaggerates the significance of the completion of stages, but Bond et al. (1993) appear to underestimate the significance of these stages within Erikson's theory. In numerous texts, Erikson describes a complex process of resolution and development throughout the lifespan (Erikson, 1950; Erikson, 1965; Erikson, 1978; Erikson, 1982; Erikson, 1997; Erikson et al., 1986). His approach, whether it is a model or a theory, focuses on the process of resolution to ensure development over the lifespan and is a proscriptive view of ageing despite not being developed from empirical studies. In addition, this

elaborate explication of the lifespan development theory over a long career would not be necessary to present merely a biographical approach which emphasises the importance of exploring individuals' history to understand their experiences of ageing.

Vital involvement

One aspect of Erikson's theory which was uniquely positive in developmental theory was his premise about older people's *vital involvement* in life. Erikson et al. (1986) carried out research which illustrated that individuals continue to engage in issues of resolution and integration throughout the life course and they do not cease engaging in life when old age begins. This was in contrast to stereotypical views about older people being *stuck in their ways* and finding it difficult to engage in a changing environment. Erikson et al.'s (1986) study was also one of the few pieces of empirical work in which Erikson explored his developmental theory. In the study the eight stages of lifespan development were reviewed using data generated with twenty-nine octogenarians during multiple semi-structured interviews using a life-history approach. The interview data were analysed to illustrate how these octogenarians worked through issues and achieved integration within the eight stages of development. The researchers showed that older people seek integration and prevent despair through integration just as individuals seek other resolutions during earlier stages of life (Erikson et al., 1986). Erikson et al. (1986; p. 54) explain that, "each stage in life involves the individual in reintegrating in new, age-appropriate ways, those psychosocial themes that were ascendant in earlier periods". Successful resolution of significant themes from earlier stages of life result in integration whereas unsuccessful resolution results in a fear that life is too short to address these important issues and despair becomes a risk.

The findings from Erikson et al.'s (1986) study illustrate the significance of vital involvement in old age and older people's continued engagement with life but the findings were restricted to providing examples for an existing framework. Erikson et al. (1986) did not review or critique Erikson's lifespan development theory when they carried out their study. They used the eight stage development theory as a framework to explore the lives of twenty-nine octogenarians. The stages of development were presented as given and the participants' lives were presented in the way that they fitted the stages of development. In the analysis the researchers did not question whether the participants' stories reflected the eight stages of development. Pieces of data which

illustrated each of the eight stages were presented to the reader and the theory was thus elaborated by their research. Bond et al. (1993) have explained that Erikson's work is a model with which to explore the last stage of life and not a theory of ageing and it might not be necessary to provide evidence to illustrate each of the stages. Erikson et al. (1986) present the stages as a *theory* of development and provide data to illustrate hypotheses about lifespan development. They found evidence which illustrates concepts in the theory and do not critically assess whether the eight stage theory is a suitable model for exploring lifespan development. The research questions they asked study were framed by the lifespan development theory and the findings were used to illustrate the theory with pieces of data. The research was not an open ended study to discover whether individuals' experiences of ageing provide evidence to support the lifespan development theory.

The social context

Like other theories of ageing, the disengagement theory and the lifespan development theory are also criticised for neglecting the social context of ageing. Consequently their usefulness for understanding the experience of ageing is limited. In the disengagement theory negative social expectations about older people and their lack of opportunities to engage positively in society are disregarded by Cumming & Henry (1961). In their analysis Cumming & Henry (1961) do not acknowledge the impact of social constraints on older people and how these contribute to older people's withdraw from social life. They, and others since, perceive older people's withdraw as a positive choice rather than an inevitable process in a society which provides few meaningful opportunities for older people to engage in social life. In contrast to the rocking chair view of old age, presented by the disengagement theory, the activity theory sets up old age as a golden time for pursuing lifelong ambitions. Again, however, the social constraints on the older person's opportunities for pursuing activities are ignored within the activity theory.

The lifespan development theory is also criticised for ignoring the social context of ageing. A criticism of Erikson's theory is that, like the activity theory, it lacks recognition of social factors which inhibit older people's development and therefore it makes idealistic assumptions about the possible achievements of older people (Coleman, 1993a). Coleman (1993a; p. 87-88) explains that societies might not be organised to encourage older people to develop qualities necessary for integration :

[t]here can be no guarantee that society is organised so as to encourage older people to develop the qualities subsumed under this [integrity] term. Successful ageing depends on the satisfactory resolution of issues raised earlier in life, but this internal development is itself dependant on the opportunities and encouragement provided in the person's environment. The crucial spur to growth and resolution may be lacking.

Although Erikson ignores the impact of social context on the lives of older people Coleman (1993a) explains that Erikson (1982) acknowledges that social mores restrict older people's potential. In addition, when Erikson (1950) began his theoretical writing he emphasised the significance of understanding individuals in their social context. The rhetoric of his theory acknowledges the significance of social context but his personal circumstances have influenced the development of the theory. The significance of understanding individuals' social context has become superseded by Erikson's personal view as a framework with which to understand lifespan development. For example, when describing the role of sexual relationships and intimacy in the development theory Erikson assumes heterosexuality and procreation as a priori need (Erikson, 1997; p. 65). This restricted understanding of intimacy appears to be a reflection of Erikson's personal experiences. Joan Erikson (Erikson, 1997) explicitly states that it is her and her husband's personal experiences of ageing which have influenced recent developments in the lifespan development theory. When theorists with an academic research background refer to their own experience as a source of theory development, it is not surprising that the theories of ageing are marginalised and only speak for the privileged few who are active and enabled to be vitally involved in old age. In addition, those who do not engage with life and do not resolve to integrate their life experiences are not bound to a life of despair as would be predicted by Erikson. People manage to adapt in different ways and it is important to understand how they do this and not whether they fit a set of criteria which suggests they are developing healthily or unhealthily (Biggs, 1993).

In Erikson's (1997) text he reveals a ninth stage of development which takes into account the experiences of those older people who have incapacities. As Joan and Erik Erikson approach their 90s for the first time they experience the limitations associated with old age, and consequently they include this view within the lifespan development theory. Joan Erikson states that the ninth stage of development has been developed to account for an understanding of the impact of the body beginning to fail; to emphasise interaction between the individual and society; and to acknowledge the affect of

external images of old age on integration (Erikson, 1997; p. 113). The social context is emphasised within the lifespan theory only as a consequence of these social factors impacting on the lives of the theory's originator. For less privileged older people, their body begins failing them before they are in their 80s and 90s and the negative images of ageing affect them before this time. An earlier encounter with these social difficulties is especially relevant for older women and this was not addressed in the lifespan development theory. The lifespan development theory, like other psychological theories (Heidrich, 1994), neglects to address issues of gender. Various aspects of social context are ignored by the lifespan development theory and as such the theory only provides a limited perspective on the experience of ageing.

Understanding ageing

In the section above, there was a discussion about the appropriateness of the disengagement theory and the lifespan development theory for understanding the experience of ageing. These two theories of ageing try to conceptualise a complex experience within one or other model of ageing. They are criticised here for having the same shortcomings as the *grand armchair theories* of sociology, such as Talcott Parsons' theory on the family (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A grand theory tries to explain all the significant aspects of a social phenomenon within one model of social action and is therefore bound to fail in some way or another. A grand theory cannot take into account all the significant aspects of a social phenomenon for all individuals experiencing the phenomenon being explained. An alternative way of understanding social phenomena is to explore the process through which individuals make sense of an experience, that is to understand individuals' experiences of social phenomena.

Ageing and other social phenomena can be understood by focusing on individuals' interpretation of their experience. By listening to individuals' interpretation of a situation others can understand what aspects of the situation are significant to them. This is important for practitioners who support older people making choices about their future as the older person's situation changes because of : retirement; changing in social roles and social networks; having more free time; being in a better or worse financial situation; bereavement; physical incapacity; and so on. Listening to older people will reveal what social factors are significant to them. Social context is significant for understanding social phenomena and placing individuals' experiences within their social context.

These ideas about understanding social phenomena are derived from social construction theory of reality. This perspective acknowledges that the choices people make are mediated by their perception of what choices are realistically available to them (Biggs, 1993). What individuals perceive as a realistic choice is mediated by their subjective experience of *being* in the world. Dasein is a term which is used by Heidegger to describe individuals' subjective being in the world and mediated by individuals' interpretation of their opportunities and limitations (Yalom, 1980). Yalom (1980) explains that this approach to understanding the world challenges a view of the world full of objects and subjects. Individuals' interpretation of objects around them is a subjective experience which itself creates the meaning of objects. No distinction is made about an objective reality because individuals' interpretations of objects create objects' meaning and function. Individuals are active beings and their being in the world creates a reality which is perceived as a working reality.

Earlier in this chapter, it was stated that the theories of ageing do not adequately acknowledge the significance of social context on the experience of ageing. An approach which acknowledges the significance of social context would be a more meaningful approach for understanding the experience of ageing. A meaningful theory of ageing needs to include an understanding about what it means to experience many changes at a time when resources might be shrinking. The many changes older people experience have an impact on the social, biological and psychological aspects of later life and pose a potential threat to the psychologic integrity of the elder (Blazer, 1993). When there are insufficient resources to manage these changes the potential threat becomes actual. One theory which appears to focus attention on trying to answer questions about *being* in old age is the existential perspective (Thompson, 1995). Within the existential perspective questions about meaning and purpose are central and these are questions relevant for understanding the experience of ageing and are absent in the theories of disengagement and development described above. The disengagement theory presents a model of ageing but does not explore the meaning or purpose of disengagement. Likewise, the lifespan development theory does not address issues of the meaning or purpose of integrity in old age. Exploring the ontological questions will reveal why when faced by similar social circumstances older people adjust differently.

Existential philosophy

Ontological questions about meaning, purpose, and values are fundamental to human existence and are recognised within existential philosophy (Thompson, 1995). Biggs (1993) explains that within social theory to date the existential priorities have been given less attention for older people than those for younger people. Thompson (1995) suggests that there has been a neglect of existential issues in later life because ageist attitudes prevent existential issues being acknowledged as important to older people. Negative stereotypes about old age assume that older people have *no future* and therefore have difficulty sustaining meaning and purpose in their lives. Positive images of ageing, including theories such as the lifespan development theory, show that older people continue to engage in life. Some older people struggle with life and better understanding about why this occurs will be fruitful. The existential perspective is explored further within this chapter as an approach with which to understand the impact of ontological questions on adjustment in old age.

Thompson (1995) explains that adopting the existential perspective provides a useful framework to explore ontological questions with older people. The existential perspective can be adopted to seek understanding about what the impact of experiencing many changes is on meaning, purpose and values in later life. It is suggested here that the significance of ontological questions is undeveloped within the current theoretical perspectives on ageing and therefore current understanding about later life is limited. The current theories of ageing do not include an exploration of questions about meaning and purpose but presume certain values as a priori. For example, the disengagement theory and the activity theory presume that *disengagement* and *activity*, respectively, are goals of older people. Few studies have carried out an analysis of existential questions in old age and therefore in this thesis literature outwith the gerontology field will be drawn on to demonstrate the suitability of an existential focus for exploring the lives of older women. Yalom's (1980) work, in a text where he describes the use of existential psychotherapy, is useful for exploring the appropriateness of the existential perspective for understanding the experience of ageing. Yalom (1980; p. 16) draws on the domains of philosophy which he believes offer leverage in clinical work, to produce a text which is clinically useful :

[t]he basic existential concepts themselves are not complex, and they do not need to be uncoded and meticulously analysed so much as they need to be uncovered. Every person, at some point in their life, ...

has some traffic with existential ultimate concerns. What is required is not formal explication : the task of the philosopher, of the therapist as well, is to de-repress, to reacquaint the individual with something he or she has already known all along. ... Above all, the philosopher and the therapist must encourage the individual to look within to attend to his or her existential situation.

Critiques of the existential perspective

First, a critique of the existential perspective to set the theory in context. The existential perspective is criticised for adopting a nihilistic philosophy because of the existentialists' lack of belief in a *purposeful* existence. In Western societies, having no stated purpose is perceived as a negative state of being. For example, the ageist attitudes which pervade many Western societies are derived from a belief that because older people no longer contribute to the productive workforce they have no purpose and are therefore lacking in worth. A theorist adopting the existential perspective does not consider individuals' worth to be valued in terms of their purpose or usefulness. Within the existential perspective theorists consider that success is reflected in individuals' search for meaning and meaning and purpose can be found in something as simple as a loved pet (Blazer, 1993). Existentialists challenge ideals about finding purpose in life and concentrate on finding meaning in feelings, activities, and relationships. Existentialism focuses on reconciling existence without looking for *reasons for being* (Thompson, 1995).

Criticisers of existentialism suggest the theory is amoral because if there is no reason for being individuals do not have to question or concern themselves with the consequences of their actions (Thompson, 1995). Opponents criticise the emphasis on personal meaning because they fear that an individualistic philosophy has the consequence of justifying a disregard for others. However, by placing the existential theory within its historical context Craib (1976) explains why there is an emphasis on the individual with a seemingly absent concern for others. Sartre's existential theory stems from his attempts to reconcile communist theory alongside his belief in individuals' responsibility and right to personal meaning. Sartre aligned himself to communist politics but in contradiction he also believed in the importance of the individual. He elaborated a moral framework by which humans can exist and within this framework he explained that individuals must take responsibility to live a moral life. Sartre adopted Heidegger's terms and described individuals living within their individual moral framework as living an *authentic* life (Craib, 1976). Living

authentically reflects a moral way of living and reduces the risk of experiencing inner conflicts which cause distress. Living an authentic life requires individuals to recognise that they live in a world with others and a moral way of life. Individuals' moral frameworks should reflect their interaction with others. Understanding about living an authentic life and the opposite, an inauthentic life, are elaborated below through the two concepts of freedom and bad faith.

Freedom

A concept which underpins the existential perspective is a belief that human beings are characterised by their *freedom* and consequently have to accept the heavy burden of *responsibility* for their actions. Yalom (1980) uses the example of someone immersed in water to illustrate a person's freedom to choose how to act and how, at the same time, this freedom to act is a burden. The example is relevant for understanding ageing because when faced by many life changing experiences older people manage these changes in different ways. Older people are faced by many changes as they age and these changes appear overwhelming to some when others take these changes in their stride. The image of drowning might be how some older people perceive their experience of ageing as they are faced with many life changing experiences. Yalom (1980) explains that difficult experiences, such as drowning, can be managed in different ways depending on how the experience is constructed.

Yalom (1980; p. 272) explains that people are free to choose how they feel about a situation and what attitudes to adopt. For example, whether to be courageous, stoic, fantastic, cunning, or panicked :

[e]ven though the image of a drowning man possessing freedom may appear ludicrous, the principle behind the principle is of great significance. One's attitude toward one's situation is the very crux of being human, and conclusions about being human, and conclusions about human nature based solely on measurable behaviours are distortions of that nature. It cannot be denied that environment, genetics, or chance plays a role in one's life. The limiting circumstances are obvious : Sartre speaks of a "coefficient adversity". All of us face natural adversities that influence our lives. ... We are responsible still for what we make of our handicaps; for our attitudes toward them; for the bitterness, anger or depression that act synergistically with the original "coefficient adversity" to ensure that a handicap will defeat the individual. Despite, for example, the high market value on physical attractiveness, many people have a style and charm that transcend unattractive physical features. ... When all else

fails, when the coefficient is formidable, still one is responsible for the attitude one adopts toward the adversity - whether to live a life of bitter regret or to find a way to transcend the handicap and to fashion a meaningful life despite it.

Not all the choices individuals make are favoured choices but this is the burden of freedom and to achieve a sense of meaning we must accept that we made a choice. Exerting our freedom in the way we choose to feel about a situation; what attitudes to adopt; and how to act in a situation with the consequences of living an *authentic* or *inauthentic* life. Authenticity is an important concept which underpins the existential perspective. To experience authenticity individuals must recognise that an action has occurred because of a choice they made. Inauthenticity is reflected in a denial of one's freedom when individuals do not recognise that they had a choice to make. A person living life authentically develops a sense of purpose and meaning, and a person living life inauthentically develops a sense of meaninglessness. Thompson (1992) explains that this is not to suggest that a person is either living an authentic or inauthentic life rather authenticity is subject to flux and is dependent on individuals' choices. Making an authentic choice might not guarantee happiness but the consequence of living authentically is a sense of meaning and purpose. Yalom (1980) explains that authenticity requires that we acknowledge the rest of the world's impact on our actions. In contrast, he explains, that ignoring the integral influence which the rest of the world has on our actions causes us to constitute the world in such a way that it appears independent to our constitution. To constitute the world as something empirical and *out there* means to constitute it as something independent of ourselves. This device allows us to flee from our freedom and we live inauthentically.

Bad faith

Sartre develops Heidegger's concept of living inauthentically. He discusses a concept of *bad faith* which individuals experience when they do not live within their moral framework. Bad faith is the consequence of living an inauthentic life and is manifest in negative feelings toward oneself such as guilt and remorse. Sixsmith (1993; p. 218-19) explains :

[t]he idea of "facing up to life", of struggling to transcend the contingencies of life, is at the core of the existentialist view of human being. While much of life might be structured by external factors, we do not have to live our lives according to a predetermined blueprint, but are free to make choices within available options. So how do we

make choices in life? Arguably, the common way of being is governed by conformism; doing what others want you to do, a kind of socially defined, “unauthentic” [*sic*] self. This amounts to self-deception, where we evade personal responsibility by acting in ways that are expected of us or following the well-trodden paths of life. ... For thinkers such as Sartre, there are no codes of conduct which we can turn to for guidance. Any action which does not derive from the exercise of one’s absolute freedom of choice is an act of “bad faith”.

Blazer (1993) suggests that bad faith can occur in later life when an older person avoids existential questions by filling their days with activities and leaving no time for reflection. Older individuals spending their days doing voluntary work might fill their time, but the work might not provide meaning or purpose. For example, a busy older woman can avoid discovering what her situation has become in old age by keeping herself busy doing voluntary work. The work is a distraction but might not reflect the woman’s values and attitudes. An image of busyness gives the appearance of being engaged in life but the older woman might not be *vitaly involved* because she is avoiding issues of adjustment associated with the changes of old age. The busy older woman might experience bad faith because she does not accept the responsibility to find out how her place in the world is changing as she ages. She ignores the influence of the subjective experience of being in the world and the affect of her actions on how she is perceived by others. The busy older woman thinks that by keeping busy she will be perceived as an engaging person and in doing so is able to challenge the negative images of ageing.

Biggs (1993) provides a reminder that body-politics are an important contributor to the negative images of ageing. Older people cannot avoid or hide from the pervasive negative images of ageing, even if they are active, and if they ignore the impact of these negative images on themselves they risk living in bad faith. The promotion of an ideal image of a 90-year-old who runs a marathon as something to aim for is criticised within the gerontology literature. It is an ideal few can achieve and the image perpetuates the desire to hide or postpone the inevitability of ageing and fuels a myth that individuals can win a fight against old age (Sidell, 1995). To avoid bad faith older people must address the many issues about growing older which are relevant to them, including a changing body, and acknowledge the subjective experience of living in a society which does not positively value older people. The ability to actively create social projects is seen as essential by the existentialists (Biggs, 1993). In later life, there are major obstacles to personal action. For example, an unwillingness of society

to ascribe a positive role for older people confounded by an increasing difficulty relating to the world caused by physical and sensory disability (Biggs, 1993). An older person who avoids actively creating a social project which incorporates these social and individual obstacles is observed to be acting in bad faith. The individual acting in bad faith does not become vitally involved with life and is at risk of developing adjustment difficulties.

Meaninglessness

Yalom (1980) claims that it is evident that as humans we crave meaning and are uncomfortable in its absence. One finds a purpose and clings to it for dear life. However, the purpose one creates does not relieve discomfort effectively if one continues to remember that this purpose was forged. It is far more comforting to believe that meaning is *out there* and that it has been discovered. The problem of meaning in life is a significant one that therapists must confront frequently in everyday clinical work. Yalom (1980) explains that Jung found that a third of his cases were suffering from the senselessness and aimlessness of their lives and not from any clinically definable neurosis. Some people are reluctant to accept responsibility for their lives and acknowledge their freedom to choose because the consequences of choices are sometimes difficult to live with. Sixsmith (1993; p. 218) explains Heidegger's understanding of human beings as *cop*ing rather than *know*ing beings :

[o]ur general state is one of habituation, ignorance, confusion, doubt and uncertainty, while many of the circumstances in which we find ourselves are largely outside our control. We might look for rational explanations, but life is very much about conflict, contradiction, dilemma and ambiguity, where competing strands in our lives are often unreconcilable. Life is rarely easy and personal well-being is not so much about being happy, but how we face up to and deal with the situation we encounter.

A sense of meaninglessness ensues when a person denies their subjectivity in the world and interprets their situation as inevitable and out of their control. Existential philosophy does not aim to blame individuals for remaining in difficult situations but aims to enable a sense of control. The existential perspective promotes a sense of personal control in a difficult situation by illustrating to individuals that they are active beings and have the freedom to make choices. The existential perspective does not deny the affects of difficult circumstances but explains that a drowning man can choose how to drown. In existential psychotherapy individuals are assisted to find

meaning in their circumstances by acknowledging their part in creating the meaning of the situation. In existential psychotherapy meaning and purpose are created by acknowledging the active role which all individuals have a responsibility to take. The aim is not to seek an objective sense of meaning, such as that provided through doing voluntary work, but rather it is to seek understanding about the subjective experience of ageing (Blazer, 1993). Existential questions are not unique to old age but the changes associated with old age might turn the older person's life upside down and the existential questions might become prominent. These changes consequently challenge existing meaning and older people need to do psychological work to integrate these changes into their life meaning. Without integration of these changes into life meaning a sense of meaninglessness might occur. Older people who do not adjust successfully in later life and to find a sense of purpose, compared to those who adjust to the changes and find meaning in later life.

Summary

In this chapter, two influential theories of ageing, disengagement theory and lifespan development theory, were critiqued and it is suggested that the existential perspective provides an alternative framework to understand the experience of ageing. Existential questions will be explored with participants in this study to identify aspects of successful and unsuccessful adjustment in later life. Currently, the social context of ageing is neglected within some influential gerontological theories of ageing. The existential perspective is presented here as a framework useful for meaningfully exploring the experiencing of ageing because within the theory the social context of individuals' lives is acknowledged. Older women who participate in the research will be asked questions which are influenced by the existential perspective to explore issues of being and meaning. This will include an exploration of the women's social context and how older women perceive themselves within their world. The broad aim of the research is to understand more about older women's subjective experience of ageing and how they find meaning in later life. The focus of the questions will be on adjustment in later life. Answers to the questions will be used to understand why some women experience successful adjustment in later life when others fail to. In addition, the findings will be used to discover whether Erikson's concept of integrity is evident among the women in this study. His work has been influential within the gerontological field and it includes a perception of adjustment in later life within the

concept of integrity. Therefore, it will be useful to discover whether his theory of lifespan development is evident among the participants in this study.

Chapter Two

Method : Grounded Theory

In this chapter, the research approach adopted in this study is presented. The aspects of the lives of older women which were of interest were those which explained adjustment in later life. The *aim of the study* is to : *compare how some women adjust positively, despite difficult circumstances, in later life when others become overwhelmed by life and do not enjoy their old age*. The qualitative perspective was chosen as a way to study this aspect of ageing with the grounded theory approach guiding the data collection and data analysis. A brief presentation of the qualitative approach is presented and a discussion of the grounded theory approach makes up the main body of the chapter. In Chapter Three, the research design and the way the data collection and data analysis were carried out is presented.

The qualitative approach

Qualitative methods of social research emphasise understanding the participants' interpretation of their social world. Qualitative researchers try to understand the participants' world by putting themselves in the shoes of the participants. The researcher's aim is to explain the world from the participants' perspective. In qualitative studies there is an emphasis on, "process rather than structure, a devotion to the study of local social and small-scale situations in preference to analysis of the societal or the psychological levels" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1996; p. 2). The aim of the study presented here is to provide an explanation of the *local* factors which affect adjustment in later life. Therefore, the qualitative approach was an appropriate way to explore questions about adjustment with older women.

Hammersley & Atkinson (1996) explain that qualitative researchers achieve their aims by using purposeful observation and conversation to develop an understanding about a particular topic or area of interest. Social researchers adopting the qualitative approach aim to make the invisible visible by studying the social world through the participants (Mills, 1959). This approach to social research enables participants to reveal previously unknown aspects of their lives to the researcher. There is an emphasis within qualitative research on observation and listening, which makes it a suitable route for the discovery of social phenomena.

Participants purposively or inadvertently reveal aspects of their selves to researchers through their interactions and the way they present themselves. The qualitative researcher learns to be alert to cues which reflect participants' interpretation of social phenomena and expose previously unknown aspects of their social life. Researchers directly and implicitly explore issues of social relevance with the participants through *purposeful observation*. The researcher observes the way participants reveal themselves and listens carefully to the way they answer questions about their lives.

Qualitative researchers are interested in the way people present themselves as one way of understanding the participants' interpretation of their situation and the self. The symbolic interactionist theory elaborated, by Blumer (1939; 1969), centres round the hypothesis that our actions are mediated by our interpretation of the meaning others put on our actions. This theory provides a framework for the qualitative researchers' approach to data collection and data analysis. When researchers use this theory to guide the research process their attention becomes focused on trying to understand social action by interpreting the meaning people assign to another's behaviour. This approach is used by researchers as a way of understanding how individuals perceive their fit in the world. Hammersley & Atkinson (1996; p. 7) explain the significance of understanding how people interpret social stimuli :

human beings are based upon, or infused by, social meanings : that is, by intentions, motives, beliefs, rules and values. ... In the view of the interactionists, people *interpret* stimuli, and these interpretations, continually under revision as events unfold, shape their actions. As a result, the same physical stimulus can mean different things to different people - and, indeed, to the same person at different times.

The grounded theory approach is one qualitative research method which assists the researcher to understand how human beings interpret their social stimuli and shape their actions. In the grounded theory approach techniques are described which enable the researcher to seek understanding about the social world of the participants. The interactionist perspective is adopted in this research with the grounded theory approach to explore the lives of older women and seek understanding about how older women interpret their old lives.

Adopting grounded theory as an research approach

Different methods of research can be used to understand the social world using the symbolic interactionist perspective and in this study the grounded theory approach was

adopted. Grounded theory is systematically and intensively analysing data incident by incident. The grounded theory approach has distinctive features which will be explained (Glaser, 1978; p. 55). Through a constant comparative method of analysis data are extensively collected and coded thus producing a well-constructed theory. It is the code which is of central importance in the generating theory and gives the researcher a condensed abstract view with scope of the data which includes otherwise seemingly disparate phenomena. Throughout the research process, the researcher creates memos to record and integrate emerging ideas about the data. The aim of a study which adopts the grounded theory approach is to link the concepts and develop a theory which explains links between categories. The focus of analysis is not merely on collecting and ordering a mass of data but on organising many ideas which have emerged from analysis of the data (Strauss, 1987; p. 22 - 24). Glaser (1978; p. 55) describes how coding produces theory from the data :

[t]he essential relationship between data and theory is a conceptual code. The code conceptualises the underlying pattern of a set of empirical indicators within the data. Thus, in generating a theory by developing hypothetical relationships between conceptual codes (categories and their properties) which have been generated from the data we "discover" a grounded theory.

Glaser (1978) explains that generating theory and doing social research are two parts of the same process. How analysts enter the field to collect data, their method of collection and codification of the data, integrating categories, generating memos, and constructing memos are all guided by the emerging theory. Grounded theory is both a perspective on data and theory (Glaser, 1978). Grounded theory is a theory, of where theory might profitably come from and of a method of how to obtain it. Adopting the grounded theory approach directs data collection and data analysis.

Incidents are compared to each other as a way of understanding the behaviour being observed. The constant comparison of the units of data is used to discover concepts in the raw data. The researcher by constantly comparing incident by incident in the data, establishes conceptual categories which serve to explain the data (Melia, 1982). Differences or similarities are labelled and categorised. Initially, all the incoming data are coded and given a separate conceptual label, but as the analysis progresses new data are analysed to see if they fit existing categories which have already been discovered. One example of a study which used the constant comparative method of analysis is Strong's (1979) study of the formulation of medical rules between

paediatricians and children's families. Strong (1979; p. 235) did not describe his study as using the grounded theory approach but he adopted Glaser's constant comparative method :

this method consists of comparing each datum with a given selection of categories and seeing whether or not it fits. Once one has coded for a category several times and developed a more sophisticated version of it, one codes only if the datum that is being examined points to a new aspect of the category. The only exception to this are categories of great theoretical interest but of which there are few examples. If the datum fits under one of them, the categories are modified or an entirely new one produced. The aim is to bring whatever initial ideas one has systematically to the data, and in the process of this to see what new ideas can be generated. Once all the data have been examined, the material relating to each is systematically scrutinised and further sub-divisions or re-groupings made, as items are found to differ or cluster together.

Glaser & Strauss (1967) describe two discriminating features of a study which adopts the grounded theory approach : the development and use of *theoretical sampling* and *theoretical sensitivity*. These two features are the distinctive analytical approaches to concurrent data collection and data analysis, which is initiated with the first data collection when grounded theory is adopted (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Theoretical sensitivity is discussed later in this chapter. First, a discussion of the methods of concurrent data collection and data analysis and analytical memo writing to show how data collection is structured by the findings from ongoing analysis through theoretical sampling.

Theoretical sampling

Glaser & Strauss (1967) explain that the analysis features of grounded theory are the constant comparative method of data analysis and memoing of the analytical process. The ideas about the meaning of the data derived from the incident to incident comparison are recorded within analytical memos. Glaser & Strauss (1967) emphasise the interdependency between data collection and data analysis. The ongoing data analysis is informed by continuing data collection and data collection is influenced by findings from the ongoing data analysis. Schatzman & Strauss (1973; p. 110) explain the purpose of theoretical sampling. They suggest that the use of concurrent data analysis and collection could merely be a working strategy. They explain that one use it has is to pace the work because this avoids the potentially crushing task of sorting out a mountain of data but without the benefit of preliminary analysis. However, more

importantly they explain that the practice of concurrent data collection and analysis has strategic purposes as an analytic strategy to adjust observational strategies through the ongoing preparation of analytical memos. As ideas emerge from the ongoing analysis they are recorded in memos, and the findings in these memos influence subsequent data collection.

Theoretical sampling ensures the findings include a sample of interesting and relevant data. In grounded theory, the sample is controlled by emerging concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Concurrent data analysis allows the researcher to exercise control over emerging ideas by virtually *checking* or *testing* ideas (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). The ongoing data collection and analysis results in shifting emphases towards some experiences which bear upon the understanding developed during the analysis. Research questions become guided by this shifting emphasis.

Ideas about the meaning of the data are logged from the beginning of the analysis and different types of memos are used to record these ideas. These memos are called observational notes (ONs), theoretical notes (TNs), and methodological notes (MNs) (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). ONs record observations during the data collection which are not theoretical ideas about concepts or the emerging theory or links between concepts. These observational notes form the bulk of fieldnotes during participant observation and include data from in-depth interviews which are not audio-taped. For example, ONs could include participants' emotional responses or their physical appearance. TNs record ideas about the links between existing categories. MNs reflect the researcher's experience in the field and record objectives to be carried out in the proceeding data collection and analysis.

The TNs play a crucial role in the emerging analysis. A TN is a memo which is incorporated within the fieldnotes alongside the data (Strauss & Schatzman, 1973). A TN is a *mini-proposition* that might form the core of an analytical scheme. Therefore, the systematic development of theoretical notes can be thought of as preliminary analysis. Recording this preliminary analysis alongside the data allows the researcher to look back on the existing data to substantiate or refute emerging ideas. These TNs follow the development in thinking about the emerging data and inform the analytical process when codes are explained in writing-up the findings.

Subsequent data collection is carried out in light of the knowledge generated from the findings recorded in the memos. As the analysis proceeds the analysts look for data which confirm or refute existing hunches about the meaning of the social behaviour being observed. Questions are directed at new data which will enable the analyst to elaborate the findings. Coding the data is another feature of the grounded theory approach. The codes which are used to explain the data form the framework for understanding the behaviour which is being studied. The practical process of coding data within a grounded theory study will be described below when the analytical processes of theoretical sampling and theoretical sensitivity have been presented.

If the researcher is using an interview or observation schedule as a guideline to focus the data collection theoretical sampling can be used to influence how the schedule changes to reflect new questions which are raised from the ongoing analysis. Glaser & Strauss (1967) do not consider the interview schedule a static research tool to be left unchanged. Some core questions are asked throughout the research but others reflect the findings from the ongoing analysis. Melia (1982; p. 330) describes how her interviews changed during the ongoing analysis :

[t]he ideas which the students raised in one interview could be tested out in later interviews if the opportunity presented itself or if a point was potentially worth developing. This progression from one interview to the next is very much in the spirit of grounded theory generation. The testing of hypothesis and search for negative cases advocated by Glaser & Strauss was carried out by this more rigorous follow-up in later interviews, of themes which emerged in the earlier ones. Increasing familiarity with both the data and the method enabled this progression to take place.

The interview schedule reflects changes in thinking about the data and is used to direct the data collection. As well as guiding the data collection theoretical sampling is used to direct the analysis by asking questions of the data. The data are searched to elaborate or refute links between categories. Theoretical sampling directs the researcher's attention to an area of interest which is lacking in knowledge. *Expert informants* are sought to provide insights on this topic (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Expert informants is a term used by Glaser & Strauss (1967) to emphasise that participants who have experienced a particular social phenomena are the experts who researchers want to collect data from. Alternatively, as questions emerge from the research when all participants have been selected the focus of the data collection alters

to provide answers to these questions. For example, interview schedules alter to gain answers to questions which emerge as the research progresses.

Theoretical sampling encourages the researcher to focus the analysis and generate theory from the data. Theoretical sampling is used to try out ideas about the data during subsequent data collection and analysis. Hypotheses about the phenomena can be posed to new data by asking questions of future participants and of existing data. Charmaz (1990) used theoretical sampling to focus the data collection during a study of chronic illness. She found that theoretical sampling was best suited for use after some key concepts had already been defined by the preliminary analysis :

[i]n contrast to Strauss (1987), I conduct theoretical sampling only after I have defined key concepts. Delaying focused theoretical sampling fosters gaining an in-depth understanding of the realities of issues at hand. ... By the time theoretical sampling is planned the researcher would have some hunches or even hypotheses which he or she wishes to check. ... For example, my research led to gathering more materials to specify and clarify the conditions under which people form identity goals and to delineate conditions under which they devise their goals.

(Charmaz, 1990; p. 1163)

In contrast, Strong (1979) carried out the constant comparative method only on the first half of the data. Having been provided with a systematic set of propositions in the first half of the data, the remaining data were analysed. These initial propositions were tested by analysing the further half of the data. Where the propositions did not fit the data the argument was amended. Strong (1979) describes the method of analysis on the second half of the data as more akin to analytic induction, that is development of the theory from the data.

Both Strong and Charmaz implement a form of theoretical sampling but use it at different stages in the research. Strong concentrated his analytical work at the beginning of the research and later searched for data which elaborated or refuted the original ideas. Whereas, Charmaz began the analytical work after she had established a few tentative ideas about the data. Strong did not describe his study as following the grounded theory approach but used the analytical processes which are described within grounded theory. These examples show how theoretical sampling is conducted alongside the constant comparative method to direct data collection. This analytical process ensures that the theory is grounded in the data because new data are sought to

confirm or refute ideas about the participants' behaviour. Grounded theory is characterised by the adoption of theoretical sampling during data collection and data analysis. Theoretical sampling on its own cannot develop grounded theory. In addition, theoretical sensitivity is a concept which is integral to developing theory grounded in data from social theory.

Theoretical sensitivity

Grounded theory is the development of the necessary theoretical sensitivity in analysts by which they can render theoretically their discovered substantive, grounded categories (Glaser, 1978). The analyst becomes theoretically sensitive to the data by exploring the meaning of the data through theoretical sampling. When the data are analysed using the techniques of grounded theory the findings are presented in the form of conceptual categories that have been discovered in the data. The analysis results in a well-grounded formal theory, which extends upwardly in abstractness and outwardly in generality (Glaser & Strauss, 1965). Analysis is completed by developing a theory of great depth and complexity that captures the variety of behaviours that characterises the central phenomena being studied (Strauss, 1987). To discover this complex abstract theory from raw data the analyst must develop theoretical sensitivity about concepts which explain the participants' behaviour. Theoretical sensitivity develops by becoming emerged in the data as well as developing a familiarity with the literature and theory relevant to the study.

A common misconception about grounded theory is that when researchers adopt the approach they are encouraged to go into a research setting with a blank sheet and no preconceived ideas about the social phenomena under investigation. When Glaser & Strauss (1967) originally presented grounded theory they emphasised a blank sheet approach because at the time they were illustrating an alternative way of carrying out social research. One way of contrasting this different approach with existing approaches was to show that researchers need not go into the field with a predefined set of questions devised by the researcher. Glaser & Strauss (1967) had developed a theory which showed researchers how to get participants to set the agenda of the research. It is not the researcher but the participant who is the expert on the social phenomenon being studied. The aim of qualitative research is to develop an understanding of social phenomena from the participants' point of view.

When referring to the analysis, theoretical sensitivity is said to develop by being immersed in the raw data and understanding the meaning of concepts which the participants identify as significant. In addition, Glaser (1978) and Strauss & Corbin (1990) suggest that researchers do not develop theoretical sensitivity merely by getting to know the data. The researchers' awareness of the current literature, their experience, and personal perspective are also important. Familiarity with the literature facilitates theoretical sampling by providing the researcher with a framework to ask relevant questions of the data. Ideas about the data which were developed from the literature were memoed along with analytical ideas about the data. The literature which provided a source of inspiration about the data in this study comes from the gerontology and existential psychotherapy fields. Berman (1994; p. 219) explains how data and the emergent theory from a study on ageing relate to existing gerontology literature :

[t]he meaning of the texts resides in its themes, but the meaning of the text also resides in its connections with the larger discourse of gerontology. A single text clearly does not prove one or another theory, but it can be placed in an imaginary dialogue in which it can be used to illustrate the theory or highlight aspects of ageing reflected in the theory.

Berman (1994) suggests that existing literature be used to place understanding of the emergent analysis within context. He suggests that researchers set up a dialogue between the new data and existing theory to understand more about the behaviour being studied. In the study presented here, existing literature informed the analysis and provided a label for the core category of searching for meaning. Glaser (1978) warns analysts that they must be cautious about using the literature in this way. They must not try to find out how the data fits the theory, rather they should ask if the theory fits the data. In this way, analysts avoid forcing the data to fit an existing theory and the possibility of being easily swayed by the fit of a theory. In the study presented here, theoretical sampling techniques were used to scrutinise the relevance of the existing literature in the same way that the raw data were scrutinised whenever a new category was identified. Questions were presented to the existing literature to discover whether data from this study confirmed or refuted theory in the existing literature and ideas about the data developed from the literature were memoed along with analytical ideas about the data. The existing theory was not used to create categories but in the later stages of the analysis links between categories were explored using knowledge of

existing theory. The findings from the analysis presented in this study will reveal whether the use of existing theory in this way restricted the findings.

Knowledge of the literature enhances the researcher's theoretical sensitivity but to develop meaningful ideas about the data the researcher must become familiar with the raw data. The researcher becomes familiar with the raw through the grounded theory methods of concurrent data analysis and constant memoing. Overall, all aspects of the researchers' knowledge contribute to their ability to develop categories and generate the theory from the data. These abilities are operationalised and integrated through what Mills (1959) describes as the researcher's *sociological imagination*. Sociological imagination is the leap in thinking which is required by the researcher to discover new insights into the social situation being observed. Analysts readily describe what is happening in the raw data but when they use their sociological imagination they develop a more meaningful understanding about what is happening. These deeper insights might challenge previously held assumptions or might make connections between concepts which broaden understanding about the wider social context within which the participants are interacting. Denzin (1978; p. 16) explains how a researcher's sociological imagination contributes to the development of theory from the data : "it is necessary to recognise that such techniques of introspection, the use of imagined experiments and the playful combination of contradictory concepts also serve as a aid in the development of theory". One way for researchers to develop their sociological imagination is through theoretical sensitivity. Strauss & Corbin (1990) explain that theoretical sensitivity refers to the personal quality of the researcher and indicates an awareness of the subtleties on meaning of data. It refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which is not. Moreover, all this is done in conceptual rather concrete terms. Having described the concepts of theoretical sampling and theoretical sensitivity the next part of the chapter will include a description of how data collected in a grounded theory study are coded.

Coding the data

Initially, all analysed data are given descriptive labels. Glaser (1978) describes these descriptive labels as substantive codes. Substantive codes often use words taken from the data to describe the experience being studied (Melia, 1982). The substantive codes do not reflect a depth of meaning or explain the phenomena being studied. Fieldnotes,

interview transcripts, and other types of data provide the content for the substantive codes. The substantive codes inform the initial analysis of any new data. Unexpected events previously not observed in the data are coded with new labels and often these are initially substantive codes. When substantive codes are developed from data collected at a later stage of the research, data collected earlier on can be re-analysed to search for examples of these concepts, before going on to develop the abstract codes.

In the later stages of analysis, theoretical codes are developed to provide a more abstract explanation of the behaviour being studied. Glaser (1978; p. 72) explains that, “theoretical coding conceptualises how the substantive codes might relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into a theory”. Several theoretical codes might fit the same data but each one explains a relationship between a particular set of substantive codes. Theoretical coding develops after the initial analysis when nearly every incident is coded or labelled with a substantive code. These theoretical codes are empty abstractions without the substantive codes. The concepts which the codes represent are emergent from the data but substantive codes are more closely linked to the raw data. The theoretical codes represent thinking about abstract links between concepts developed from understanding about the data. The substantive codes are conceptualised within the theoretical codes and are used to build the theory which is developed more meaningfully from the abstract ideas represented within the theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978).

Analysts begin identifying the substantive codes from the beginning of the research and they use these codes to label most of the raw data. Strauss & Corbin (1990) explain that it is not unusual for beginning researchers to summarise rather than conceptualise the data. They suggest that at the beginning of the research, researchers might come up with hundreds of labels. For example, in her study of student nurses’ perceptions of their work Melia (1982) had 250 theoretical notes. Glaser (1978) suggests that the theoretical coding begins when nearly every incident has been coded or labelled with a substantive code. Therefore, adopting Glaser’s (1978) method inevitably leads to hundreds of substantive codes, regardless of the experience of the researcher. As the research progresses, ideas about the data become more developed and abstract concepts are identified which provide a more meaningful understanding about what is happening.

Once the coding is complete there is a good deal of intellectual work to be done (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). The stage further on from coding is called conceptualisation. Initially, the concepts are likely to be little more than extensions of codes but at a later stage in the analysis a more abstract conceptualisation of the data is possible. Conceptual categories are grounded in both the theoretical perspectives that are applied to the research design and the data which have been collected. Bryman & Burgess (1994) use Glaser & Strauss (1967) as a reference to explain that the analysis and data collection are *inextricably* linked. The generation of concepts forms the building blocks of theory and conceptualisation is both a prior and emergent from the research process.

Saturation of concepts

The use of theoretical sampling ensures that the sample is controlled by emerging theoretical concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is used to try out ideas about the data by proposing hypotheses about the phenomena to the existing data as well any new data. Subsequent interviews or observations become informed by analytical questions and hypotheses about categories and their relationships. Participants are encouraged to discuss the area of interest under investigation until they have explored several aspects of the topic with the researcher (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). When a researcher uses an interview schedule to guide the line questioning during the research process it is used in a dynamic way. The lines of questioning followed in an interview schedule reflect the need to ask new questions as the ongoing analysis reveals a lack of understanding in a particular area. Questions stop being asked when saturation is reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The research questions continue to evolve until the researcher discerns that saturation of the phenomena has been achieved (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). When no new questions emerge from the data the lines of questioning, either to the participants or to the data, remain static. When nothing new is found the concept has reached saturation and data collection is complete.

The above description is that which is found in the methods textbooks, however theoretical saturation is a debatable aspect of the grounded theory. Other researchers do not consider that there is a point in the research when nothing new will be discovered. Charmaz (1990; p. 1169) suggests that, "memo-writing may never have closure because a researcher may make continued theoretical discoveries as his or her

memos become increasingly conceptual". She suggests that saturation can never be complete and that memo-writing cannot have closure because the researcher has never ending questions about the data. She does not adhere to the proposition that the research reaches a natural end through saturation. Rather, she suggests that the researcher must take a decision to stop asking questions of the data and ensure any existing questions are fully explained. Glaser & Strauss, (1967) describe saturation as a process which ensures the categories discovered in the data are fully explained by data. Charmaz (1990) explains that saturation is reached when the data can be fully explained and the theory can be fully substantiated with the data. Saturation might therefore be compared to a process of verification and questions can stop being asked when the *plausible story* which Melia (1997) discusses has been developed.

Developing the core category

A core category, or a basic social process, explains the behaviour being observed (Glaser, 1978). A core category accounts for the variability in a pattern of behaviour and has a function of integrating the theory (Glaser, 1978). Glaser (1978; p. 94) suggests that without a core category the effort of grounded theory will, "drift in relevancy and workability" :

[f]irst of all, the analyst should consciously look for a core variable when coding his [*sic*] data. As he constantly compares incidents and concepts he will generate many codes, while being alert to the one or two that are core. He is constantly looking for the "main theme" for what ... is the main concern or problem for the people in the social setting.

The development of a core category reflects a more abstract level of analysis than that used in the substantive coding process or in the development of the major categories of a study. Substantive codes use participants' own words to describe and label data and these codes might be validated simply by referring directly to an extract of data. Major categories require fuller explanations from the researcher to illustrate the significance of these codes. Readers require more imagination to understand the significance of abstract concepts to the participants because their relevance is less readily evident.

The core category is more highly developed than a substantive code or major category. It explains how the major categories are related and explains the variation in behaviour among the participants. Although the core category is a more abstract concept than the other categories it must be substantiated within the data. As a core category begins to

be developed the researcher searches the data to discover relationships between the major categories and identifies patterns of behaviour among the participants. The analysis process is different during this part of the research and coding is no longer the key task of the researcher. When developing a core category, memos are used to record ideas about the relationships between categories and patterns of behaviours among the participants. Continued reading of the data provides the researcher with the confidence to search the data to verify or disregard hunches about relationships and patterns in the data.

The core category explains the relationship between the major categories and tells the *story* of the findings. One way this story can be understood is by discovering the properties of the core category. Glaser (1992) explains that the property of a category is, “a type of concept that is a conceptual characteristic of a category, that is a lesser level of abstraction than a category. A property is a concept of a concept.” The core category is substantiated by explaining the relevancy of the core category’s properties to the major categories. This is significant because when the properties of the core category are elaborated through the major categories they illustrate how the core category is operationalised within the lives of the participants. Explanations about how the properties of a core category relate to the major categories serve to explain the relationship between the major categories. The relationship between the major categories is abstracted through their interaction with the properties of the core category. The abstraction ties together the major categories and operationalises the core category. The researcher explains the interactions and relationships between the major categories through the properties of the core category and the social phenomenon under investigation is more meaningfully understood. This explanation of the relationships and interactions between the major categories through the properties of a core category tells the story of the data. The breadth and depth of the participants’ experiences are succinctly conceptualised within a core category and its properties.

Summary

The grounded theory approach is described as a distinctive set of techniques which guide researcher to discover theory from data. When this approach is adopted by researchers they claim its many virtues. It is a flexible approach to research and as researchers engage in the ongoing data analysis of grounded theory they are

encouraged to continually revise theoretical assumptions in response to the research findings. This unstructured approach encourages the exploration of new areas of interest as they emerge during the research process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). When a grounded theory study is undertaken an open approach to existing knowledge is adopted. When developing the research questions the researcher is not required to start with pre-existing theory to test or refute. The purpose of using grounded theory is to build rather than test theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The research questions evolve through the research process and the ongoing analysis structures the study as the analyst discovers interesting phenomena present in the social situation being observed. This flexible open approach provides opportunities for developing theory which challenges previously held common assumptions about social life.

There are techniques which can be adopted to achieve this open flexible approach but they are criticised for being an unnecessarily laboriously method of analysis. For example, if the focus of a study is determined during the early stages of research a dynamic interaction between the data collection and data analysis might not be necessary. The interdependence between the data collection and data analysis might be created by a poorly constructed research design. Better knowledge from the beginning of the research might preclude the need for an open flexible approach. Schatzman and Strauss (1973) suggest that the grounded theory approach might have more than analytical merit alone. They explain that without concurrent data collection and analysis the researcher will be swamped with a mountain of data at the end of the data collection. Perhaps carrying out a study with a more structured focus could also prevent the researcher becoming overwhelmed by a mountain of data to be analysed at the end of data collection. Glaser (1978) supports the use of grounded theory even in a narrowly defined study because it enhances concept identification and theory development. Grounded theory allows new and unexpected ideas to be incorporated into the findings whether they are pure description or explanations and theory (Glaser, 1978). Whether a study has an undefined or tightly structured focus methods which ensure that new and challenging ideas can be discovered and incorporated within the findings should be welcomed, even if the method is an unnecessarily laboriously method of analysis.

It is also claimed that grounded theory is good science because the approach provides a thorough audit trail (Glaser, 1978). Like other social research studies, a study which adopts the grounded theory approach must produce robust findings. The grounded theory approach inherently produces a research process with the necessary rigor to make the emergent theory *good science*. In grounded theory the methods by which concepts are discovered in the data are clear and visible (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The researcher adopting the grounded theory approach uses the fieldnotes and the analytical memos to reveal how ideas and theory were developed. The grounded theory approach presents a detailed record of the procedures and techniques used to discover the presenting theory, demonstrating the grounding of findings in the data. The *audit trail* (Sandelowski, 1993) is made explicit from the beginning of the research in grounded theory because the memos provide ongoing evidence about the emerging concepts. Grounded theory also helps the analyst to break through any bias and assumptions brought to the research process (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Assumptions and bias are challenged as the memos are written-up and supported with data. The ongoing incident by incident analysis alerts the researcher to new and interesting findings in the data and requires the researcher to constantly search to support or contradict findings. Until sufficient evidence confirms or refutes the meaningfulness of a category, the analyst continues to search for evidence to define and elaborate the category. Theoretical sampling enables the researcher to actively seek evidence for an idea by adjusting the data collection to emerging ideas (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). The results from the grounded theory approach are a sophisticated illustration of the categories.

Perhaps most researchers already adhere to the techniques described as characteristic of the grounded theory approach and therefore its techniques are merely good practice in social research. It might be that most researchers employ the techniques of concurrent data collection, make the analysis drive the data collection, and carry out constant memoing to log ideas about the data collection and analytical links. If this is the case, many researchers continue to resist the use of grounded theory and its analytical methods, and suggest alternative ways of achieving scientific rigor within qualitative research. The reason for their resistance could be Glaser and Strauss' use of sociological and prescriptive language. Particularly, the eighteen families of theory suggested by Glaser (1978) and Strauss & Corbin's (1990) three-levelled hierarchy of analysis and descriptions of how to define a category's properties, dimensions, and

conditions. In summary, overall, significant benefits can be gained from adopting the grounded theory approach. Its open and flexible approach ensures that new and challenging ideas are incorporated within the ongoing analysis. When these ideas are confirmed as worthy within the data they are developed as concepts within the theory. Within the grounded theory approach there is also a robust and explicit audit trail written in the fieldnotes which the researcher attentively records alongside the data. Grounded theory provides the researcher with an approach which facilitates the inclusion of imaginative thinking in the theory and findings which stand up to scrutiny.

Chapter Three

Research Design, Data Collection and Data Analysis

The research in this study was carried out at two day centres for older people in Edinburgh. The data consist of nine months of participant observation and in-depth interviews with fourteen women from the day centres. The *aim of the study* is to : *compare how some women adjust positively, sometimes despite difficult circumstances, in later life and others become overwhelmed by life and do not enjoy their old age.* The *research questions* aim to find out : why some women manage their later life successfully when others struggle with later life and experience an unhappy old age *and* what is distinctive about women who struggle with their old lives compared to women who enjoy a happy old age. The participant observation data focus on interactions among the women at the day centres, with other members, the staff, volunteers, visiting practitioners, and other visitors to the day centre. Participants for the in-depth interviews were recruited from the day centres and the interviews focused on women talking about their struggles in old age. In this chapter, a description of how the research was carried out is presented.

Selecting a fieldsite and gaining access

The choice of fieldsite has a significant influence on the data generated from a study and is an important consideration at the beginning of the research process. Initially, I considered whether interviews with women who had recovered from a recent episode of depressive illness would generate data to explain women's struggles in later life. Women who had received treatment for depression would have received an assessment of their mental health and this would indicate that they are not experiencing a successful old age. It was thought that interviews with women who were recovering from a depressive illness would provide data to explain why some women struggle with their old lives and do not experience a successful and happy old age. Accordingly, recruiting volunteers through psychiatric services was investigated. Various psychiatric services and specialist practitioners providing care for older people with mental health problems in Edinburgh were selected as possible sources of participants. I spent a few days at a psychiatric day hospital for older people; interviewed a consultant psychogeriatrician; and interviewed a community psychiatric

nurse with a client group of older people with functional illnesses. The visits and interviews were reviewed to discover whether these fieldsites would be appropriate for this study. The visits to the psychiatric day hospital for older people showed that clients at the day hospital do not always receive treatment at the day hospital because of any proven therapeutic benefits of the treatment they were receiving. Clients remain at the day hospital because of social circumstances, the chronic nature of an illness, or concomitant associated disorders related to a psychiatric illness. The day hospital was therefore not pursued further as a possible fieldsite. When the community psychiatric nurse was interviewed she explained that the clients she provided care for were a particularly vulnerable group of older women who were sometimes working through lifelong troubles. The consultant psychogeriatrician explained that she received referrals for clients who experienced severe or chronic psychiatric illnesses. Women recruited through a community psychiatric nurse or a consultant psychogeriatrician would therefore not have been suitable participants for a research study trying to understand the lives of older women and their daily struggles in later life. The data collected would have provided understanding about a particular vulnerable group of women and those experiencing a severe psychiatric illness. Mechanic (1978) states that a diagnosis of mental illness reflects the interaction of more factors than mental health state alone. His findings were apparent among the psychiatric services for older people I visited as potential fieldsites. For example, at the day hospital it was not the person's psychiatric illness on its own which effected decisions about continuation of treatment because clients' social circumstances and associated disorders were also significant; the community psychiatric nurses had a client group of women dealing with lifelong issues as well as a current psychiatric illness; and factors other than psychiatric illness such as gender and social class effect referral to a consultant psychogeriatrician. The psychiatric services route for recruiting participants was abandoned. Focusing on a group of older women who have been treated for depressive illness in these services would provide understanding about a specific group of women. Recruiting from psychogeriatric services would have produced data which focused understanding on the experience of a depressive illness and neglected the wider perspective of the experiences of ageing which is of interest in this study. Adopting this approach would have captured only part of the aims of this study.

Participants who reported struggling with life, regardless of their mental health state, were sought to take part in this study. It could be expected that some women who

describe their struggle with life are also experiencing symptoms of depressive illness but the *illness experience* is not the only focus of this study. Ideally, the participants would be a cross-section of people and have among them a group of women who were struggling with their later lives as well as those who were enjoying a successful old age. Murphy's (1982) study of the social origins of depressive illness among older populations found that physical illness and a lack of a confidante were significant predictive factors for depressive illness. She found an association between physical illness and having a confidante with depressive illness. Therefore in this study which aims to understand why some women do not manage a successful happy old age when others do it will be useful to find a fieldsite which has among them a group of women who experience physical illness and who are socially vulnerable. These two criteria will provide a source of potential participants from which to understand the experiences of older women.

A residential care setting was considered as a possible research site because in a residential setting there are residents who are mostly physically and socially vulnerable. On reflection, this option for a fieldsite was dismissed because the issues which older people struggle with in a residential setting are related to communal and institutional living and not only their experiences of ageing. The findings from this type of fieldsite would focus on the difficulties people manage when living in residential care. A general day hospital was considered as a possible research site. From my experience of day hospital services I expected that among many patients receiving day hospital treatment there would be a high proportion of older people who were physically and socially vulnerable. However, the investigation into a psychiatric day hospital showed that the clients received treatment not only for reasons related to their illness because social circumstances and associated disorders were also considered. It could be expected that clients from a general day would be treated similarly. The aims might be rehabilitation but sometimes clients receive treatment longterm and become dependant on the day hospital. A group of participants recruited from a day hospital are not likely to be a cross-section group of older women but ones who particularly benefit from the services a day hospital offers.

Alternatively, a day centre was considered because it would potentially provide contrasting groups of older people who are physically and socially vulnerable as well as those who are physically fit and socially active. Generally, large sized day centres

in Edinburgh provide a day care service, a lunch club, taught classes, such as pottery and ballroom dancing, and the membership is a cross-section of older people. Day centres in Edinburgh only provide day care for older people who are housebound and physically frail elderly because of limited resources, and those who join in the taught classes are among the physically fit older people. These characteristics would provide a cross-section of older people and make day centres a likely source of older women struggling with their old age but it would not be a specific group of women. The other fieldsites considered would have resulted in recruiting women from a particular group of older people in contact with health services for particular reasons. Choosing a day centre as the fieldsite restricts the potential participants to women who join in social activities with other older people. Women who become members of a day centre are of a particular characteristic and might bias the sample but at most day centres there are hundreds of members. The large numbers of members increases the likelihood that the members are a cross-section of older people. By choosing this type of fieldsite older women who are isolated, by choice or not, will be missed but it would be difficult to recruit older women who are not in touch with health and social services or another gatekeeper type service. I considered recruiting participants through a newspaper advertisement but decided that this would create a bias in the sample because only particular types of women are likely to respond to an advert calling for volunteers to take part in a piece of research. A church group was also considered but there seemed to be no particular advantage of choosing a church group over a day centre and again the sample would be peculiar to the type of church group which was chosen. Overall, it was considered that a day centre would be a suitable fieldsite to recruit participants to this study.

A local day centre was approached to find out more about its membership and its suitability for recruiting participants for this study. The first day centre I visited had three hundred members and provided a day care service for frail older people and taught classes for the active elderly. I discussed the aims of my research with the manager of the day centre and explained that I wanted to interview about thirty women who described themselves as having difficulties in old age. The manager asked me questions about the research and I asked her about the numbers of potential participants. I explained that I wanted to interview women about their experiences of ageing and in particular focus on their struggles to understand why some women do not manage to enjoy a happy old age. When I approached the manager of the day

centre I initially sought permission to hand out letters to all the members of the centre asking for volunteers to take part in this study. She explained that this method would be fruitless because the members would not read any letter I sent them. She suggested that members would either disregard my letter as another unimportant official letter or worry about what they were being told to do and ask one of the day centre staff to deal with it. I therefore suggested that I worked at the day centre for a couple of weeks getting to know the members and then approach suitable women to take part in an interview. The manager accepted this proposal and was enthusiastic about my working at the day centre.

We then discussed whether my aim of interviewing thirty women was realistic for this day centre. The manager said that off the top of her head she could think of ten women who would be suitable, and would come back with further suggestions. On balance, I considered that interviews with thirty women was a realistic aim because the day centre had a membership of three hundred with a large group of day care members who are socially and physically vulnerable. As the research progressed it became apparent that the period spent *getting to know* the women became a rich source of participant observation data and an integral source of data to support the in-depth interview data. Access to the second day centre was gained in a similar way to the first day centre. The second day centre also had a membership of three hundred and by the time I visited this day centre I only wanted to carry out a few more interviews so their membership number was more than sufficient. By the end of the study, there were nine months of participant observation data and in-depth interview data with fourteen women. These data are used to develop meaningful understanding about women's experiences of ageing in this thesis.

Ethical considerations

It is important to discuss ethical aspects of the study because researchers have a responsibility to ensure participants are not compromised by their involvement in a study. Older people who do not get the opportunity to talk about their lives might volunteer for a study because the researcher is showing an interest in them (Kayser-Jones & Koenig, 1994). The least that should be gained from participants is *informed consent*. This means that when participants consider taking part they are aware of what the researcher is asking of them (Butler, 1990). Researching a sensitive topic with a vulnerable group requires particular attention to ethical concerns. Researchers

have a responsibility to consider possible consequences of taking part in research and explaining these to participants before they agree to take part. For example, the consequences of talking in-depth about difficult circumstances might not be initially evident to the potential volunteer. The possible cathartic affects of taking part in an interview in this study were discussed with volunteers in advance as part of the informed consent process.

Older people might also be more vulnerable than other groups of potential participants because they might not realise that they have a choice about participating in the research. When someone of authority (the researcher) approaches them to take part in research older people might feel obliged to do so. When an older person is receiving health or social care and is asked to take part in a piece of research through a gatekeeper person the older person might fear that that their care will be effected if they do not agree to take part in the research (Butler, 1990). The participants in my study were recruited from a *captive audience* (Robson, 1993) at the day centres and one problem of collecting data from a captive audience within a care setting is, "the difficulty that some people have in disentangling the researcher from the staff of the agency that provides the service" (Butler, 1990). It was therefore important to ensure that the participants in this study were aware of the researcher's role in a care setting and that they were volunteers and not taking part unknowingly when they talked with me at the day centre. Kayser-Jones & Koenig (1994; p. 21) explain how clarification can be achieved by gaining informal informed consent day-to-day :

[i]n participant observation, consent is negotiated formally when first entering the field. Thereafter, however, the researcher must engage in an almost daily process of obtaining "informal" informed consent, constantly explaining his or her activities and presence and creating meaningful social bonds with the subjects.

In contrast, to these fears about the vulnerability of older people volunteering to take part in research my experience from this study revealed that the women at the day centres were not particularly vulnerable with regard to being coerced to take part in a piece of research. Recruiting an adequate number of participants for the in-depth interviews took longer than anticipated because the women at the day centres were not willing to take part in audio-taped interviews. The women in this study were adequately able to refuse and showed no signs of feeling obliged to volunteer or a lack of awareness that they could refuse to take part. Researchers should not be complacent about older people's ability to refuse to take part in research but at the same time they

can be confident that older people are as capable as any group of potential volunteers to refuse.

Activities at the day centres

To provide a view of the fieldsite where this study was carried out the next part of the discussion includes a description of the daily activities at the day centres. The two day centres where the research was carried out provide various services for people over 55 within different geographical areas of Edinburgh. The centres provide similar services and distinctions about the way they provide services are not made here. The day centres are open from 10am to 4pm five days a week and provide taught classes, a lunch club, and a day care service. Funding comes from social services and charitable trusts, and in addition, the members pay fees for the services they use. Any older person from the local area might enrol for the taught classes or come to the lunch club. Due to limited resources, referral is required to receive transport to the day centre to come to the lunch club or the day care service. Members who need to be provided with transport to come to the centre have to meet particular criteria and hence most day care members and those who were picked up to come to the lunch club are socially isolated and housebound older people. When members move to a different geographical area or into residential accommodation they often have to relinquish their mini-bus place and day care service and lunch club place.

The day centres are run by a manager and an assistant manager. The support staff include an occupational therapy assistant, one catering member of staff, an administrator, two drivers and a helper for the driver, teachers for the taught classes, and volunteers who in the main help with the lunch club. Community practitioners are attached to the day centres and visit regularly, they include : an occupational therapist, a social worker, a health visitor, a dentist, a chiropodist, an optician, and so on. Both day centres have an on-site hairdresser and a bath which staff assist a few members to use. Although some members are frail they do not require special care while they are at the day centre, but staff assist with mobilising around the centre and going to the toilet. There are three hundred members at each of the day centres : overall two hundred members attend the taught classes and each day there are between fifteen to thirty day care members and fifteen to thirty lunch club members. The members who come independently to the centre come any day and as often as they want to but those who are provided with transport are allocated to come from one to three days a week.

Rarely, a member receives five days day care a week. Among the day care service and in the taught classes at the day centres male members were thin on the ground. The membership reflects the current demographic trends and lifelong socialisation patterns of men and women which show that older women have a greater tendency to be members of day centres than men (Jerrome, 1992).

The life experiences of the members varied and reflected the distinctions about the experiences of ageing, made by Neugarten (1974), between the young-old and the old-old. Those who attend the taught classes are the fit elderly and those who are day care members are the frail elderly. Lunch club members include both the fit elderly and the frail elderly because some come to the day centre under their *own steam* and others are *bussed-in* on the centres' mini-buses. Those who come to the centres for day care and those who are provided with transport to come to the lunch club are housebound and socially isolated older people. These members can be described as the old-old. The fit elderly are members of the taught classes, come to the lunch club independently, and can be described as the young-old. These distinctions are independent of the members' ages because some of the frail elderly are in their 60s and early 70s and some members over 80 can be described as the fit elderly. However, the general trend is that day care members were chronologically older than those who attended the taught classes.

In her research on friendship among older women, Jerrome (1992; 1993a; 1993b) has included studies of pensioner clubs. She found that most members of these clubs are women from working class backgrounds living on their own. This same pattern is found in the day centres where this study was carried out. In the main, the day centre membership where the fieldwork was carried out is made up of women from working class backgrounds despite the catchment areas of each of the centres covering working class and more affluent areas of Edinburgh. Middle class women are less likely to join a pensioner club because they continue their existing extra-work and age-mixed associations which are established during their working life (Jerrome, 1993b). The middle class women have a resource of alternative leisure activities whereas working class women welcome the opportunities offered by the day centres. Middle class women are also more likely than working class women to know people with cars who can visit them or take them to places. In addition, they might continue with their lifelong social activities longer than working class women do because they are less

likely to experience restricting health problems than working class women are (Sidell, 1995).

At the day centres some of the women knew each other from when they worked together in local factories. The few middle class women who were members found it difficult to make friends at the day centre because they found few people with backgrounds similar to theirs. One woman who took part in an in-depth interview, Miss B, explained that she felt isolated at the day centre. Miss B was different from the majority of the members because she had not had a life long marriage, did not have any children, and had enjoyed her career. One woman talked about Miss B's life. She told Miss B that she thought her life must have been fulfilling but wondered if Miss B felt lonely now because she did not have a family to care for her. For the majority of the members at the day centres, their life was centred on their family. Lopata (1995) explored the lives of widowed women and found that working class women's social network tends to be family centred whereas middle class women have mixed sources of friendships.

The day care service is described here because the participant observation was carried out with women who came to the day centres for day care. The aim in this section is to give a picture of the daily routine of the day care service. It was similar at both day centres and therefore they are not described separately. The day care service is provided in a large room at the day centres where informal social activities, such as bingo, keep fit, quizzes, and so on take place. First thing in the morning, the day care members chat over a cup of tea and discuss the day's news while reading newspapers. Later in the morning, various social activities are organised by the occupational therapy assistants. Some members play dominoes and others chat with their friends. Drinks are served in the large rooms at various intervals during the day and lunch is provided in a separate dining area. A different activity is organised for the afternoon and this is usually bingo.

Staff at the day centres spend the majority of their time with the day care members. One member of staff is allocated to carry out an initial assessment for new day care members and this member of staff also carries out home visits to members who the day centre staff are concerned about. Staff also provide a social support role for day care members. For example, staff give advice and support with financial difficulties, housing crises, and family disputes. Staff were knowledgeable about social security

benefits and local authority services. These are necessary skills because many of the members receive benefits and the staff are asked to assist with official applications for funds and services. The occupational therapist assistants spend all of their day with the day care members and they organise the social activities. They spend time chatting with the members and during the day they often focus their attention on one or two members who they think need extra support. They also do daily shopping trips and when they go they take with them a day care member in a wheelchair to the local supermarket to collect small items of shopping for the other members. The day care members particularly appreciate this service because most of them are housebound frail elderly people living on their own and have difficulties doing day-to-day shopping. Generally, the day care members appeared to have a lot of fun chatting and joining in the social activities.

Biographies of the women who took part in the in-depth interviews

This section provides a summary of biographical data about the women who took part in the in-depth interviews. These summaries do not try to suggest that there is any representativeness about the sample of participants because in-depth interviews were only carried out with fourteen women. What these biographical details provide is an indication of the social background of the women who took part in in-depth interviews. The women ranged from 60 to 87 years. The two women recruited from the taught classes were in their early 60s and all the others were over 80 years. Table 1 presents a summary of the day centre memberships among the women who took part in the interviews.

Table 1 Summary of day centre membership among in-depth interview participants

| Type of membership | Numbers |
|------------------------------------|---------|
| Taught classes | 2 |
| Lunch club - no transport provided | 1 |
| Lunch club - with transport | 2 |
| Day care | 9 |
| Total | 14 |

The socioeconomic status of the participants is reflected in Table 2 and Table 3 which presents a summary of the women's working history and the type of housing they live

in. Seven of the women had non-manual occupations, such as clerical and shop work, and the other seven women worked as domestics or in factories. There was an equal distribution of women living in local authority housing and owner occupied homes. None of the women were from a professional background or living in privately rented housing. Again, this distribution is not presented as representative of women at the day centres but provides a picture of the women who took part in the in-depth interviews. The figures suggest that among the women who took part in the in-depth interviews there was an equal distribution of working class and middle class backgrounds.

Table 2 Working history among in-depth interview participants

| Working history | Numbers |
|-----------------------|---------|
| Manual occupation | 7 |
| Non-manual occupation | 7 |
| Total | 14 |

Table 3 Type of housing among in-depth interview participants

| Type of housing | Numbers |
|-------------------------|---------|
| Home ownership | 7 |
| Local authority housing | 7 |
| Total | 14 |

Table 4 and Table 5, respectively, illustrate the living arrangements and marital status of the women who took part in the interviews. Only two of these women were living with someone. One lived with her sibling and the other lived with her partner. One woman had been living with her sister up until recently when her sister died. None of the women were still married but one lived with her partner. Nine of the women were widows and two had been widowed twice. None of the widows had been widowed recently (within two years). Most of the widows lost their husbands a number of years ago (more than five years). Four were never married and one woman was divorced before the Second World War after a short marriage.

Table 4 Living arrangements among in-depth interview participants

| Living arrangements | Numbers |
|---------------------|---------|
| Living alone | 12 |
| Living with partner | 1 |
| Living with family | 1 |
| Total | 14 |

Table 5 Marital status among in-depth interview participants

| Marital status | Numbers |
|----------------|---------|
| Widowed once | 7 |
| Widowed twice | 2 |
| Divorced | 1 |
| Never married | 4 |
| Total | 14 |

Table 6 illustrates the type of accommodation where the women were living. Five of the women lived in sheltered housing and one lived in residential accommodation. The rest were living in their family home (rented or owner occupied). A family home is described here as one where the woman has lived for a long period (more than ten years) and which is not supported accommodation, such as sheltered housing. One woman tried to live with her daughter, found it was unsuccessful, and moved into sheltered housing where she now lives. Another woman who lived in sheltered housing was interviewed while she was staying in a residential home where she regularly books herself in for respite care. Among those who were living in their family home, some were receiving community home care and others were continuing to live an independent life.

Table 6 Type of accommodation among in-depth interview participants

| Type of accommodation | Numbers |
|-------------------------------|---------|
| Sheltered / supported housing | 5 |
| Residential accommodation | 1 |
| Family home | 8 |
| Total | 14 |

These biographical summaries are presented to give a crude picture of the women who took part in the in-depth interviews. They show that the women come from mixed backgrounds and experience different social circumstance. The interviews revealed that what these women share is their struggle with life. It is not immediately evident

why these women share this problem of not managing to adjust successfully in later life. It might be surprising that those who are socially and physically vulnerable as well as those who experience a physically and socially active old age struggle in later life because research studies emphasise the significant effect of physical illness and social isolation on mental well-being (Brayne & Ames, 1988). Eight of the in-depth interview participants were housebound and four were physically fit and active older women. Analysis of the participant observation data also reveals that circumstances do not predict how a woman experiences old age. The participant observation data provides contrasting examples of women enjoying a successful old age and struggling with old age. Women's social circumstances vary and there are examples of housebound frail elderly women extolling the joys of life and struggling with life.

Collecting and recording the data

Data collection began with periods of participant observation when I handed out introductory letters describing this study. I had expected that early on I would get to know a few women who were suitable participants for this study, recruit these women to the study, carry out the interviews, and complete the research within a few months. Others have found that older people are only too willing to talk about their lives (Townsend, 1957; Bury & Holme, 1990). In this study, the women welcomed me to the day centre and chatted to me openly about intimate aspects of themselves and their lives. Their initial reaction made me optimistic about my ability to recruit participants to take part in in-depth interviews. However, as the manager of the day centre had suggested, I did not receive any responses to the letters I handed out. In the meantime, I began writing-up daily fieldnotes after each session at the day centre to record interactions between the members and interactions in which I participated. These notes were transcribed directly onto a computer using word processing documents.

Next, I made a concerted effort to recruit women for in-depth interviews by setting up small focus groups to discuss the issue of depression and asking participants to take part further in the research. I chose to explore the issue of depression as one way of finding out about women's perceptions of an unhappy old age. Presenting the question of depression generated interesting discussions between the women. This topic led the women to discuss what had caused them distress and satisfaction in their lives and these group interactions were recorded as data in the daily fieldnotes. Participants volunteered and this approach achieved the aim of recruiting suitable women to take

part in in-depth interviews. In addition, I introduced the study to women who attended the taught classes at the day centre. I discovered that many of these women were indignant that they had been identified as potential participants for a study which explored issues around depression in later life. They suggested that I ask the day care members at the day centre to take part because they were more likely to be of help in a study which explored older people's unhappiness. Despite their negative reactions the women talked about their experiences of later life with me, both positive and negative, and the discussions generated interesting data. These discussions also resulted in suitable women volunteering to take part in in-depth interviews.

The social circumstances of the women from the taught classes and those using day care services are contrasting. Collecting data at the day centres provided the opportunity to compare life incidents gathered during interactions with women from each of these two groups. The women from the taught classes are from the fit and active elderly groups compared to women from the day care service who are the frail elderly. There were also contrasts within these two groups. Not all fit and active women were managing their old age successfully and among the frail elderly members there were different experiences of old age with some frail women managing life successfully despite difficult circumstances. The stories from women who were fit and active or frail, and either enjoying their later life or finding life a struggle, were contrasted to explain how women manage their lives in later life.

At the first day centre, I spent two to three hours a day, four days a week, for six months carrying out participant observation. At the second day centre, I spent two to three hours a day, two to three days a week, for six weeks carrying out participant observation. I visited the day centres in the mornings because the women chat to each other at this time and it provided opportunities to learn more about their lives and explore relevant issues with them. In the afternoons, the members play bingo and conversation is definitely discouraged at this time. Over time, I began to know the women better and I asked them searching questions about their lives. Interesting and relevant questions about their lives arose during conversations from the ongoing data analysis. These questions were pursued during subsequent participant observation.

The participant observation continued while more volunteers were sought for the in-depth interviews and the participant observation data yielded interesting examples of

how the women talked about their lives with one another and others, including myself. Daily fieldnotes continued to be taken and by the end of the research they were a rich source of data. In total, the participant observation data consisted of just over three hundred pages of transcribed observational notes on single-sided paper with double spacing and large margins on either side of the page.

The in-depth interviews

There were two exclusive criteria for participation in this study. Cognitive impairment was an exclusive criterion because it would limit a woman's participation in an in-depth interview about experiences of ageing. Staff at the day centres pointed out to me members with a cognitive impairment. Also excluded were women who were too vulnerable to take part in the research. Staff pointed out women to me who they considered would be unsuitable to take part in the research because of the way they were currently managing their social problems. In addition, some women the staff suggested for me to interview were unsuitable participants because when I talked with them about their lives at the day centre they became tearful and upset about their current situations. Although some of these women volunteered to take part in this study I did not ask them to so. It was apparent that they were socially and emotionally vulnerable at the time and it would not have been appropriate to ask them to talk more intimately in an in-depth interview about aspects of their lives which were causing them significant distress.

The inclusive criterion for participation in an in-depth interview was a feeling that life was a struggle in old age. The women who were approached to take part in an interview were those women who recounted stories of struggle to me; those whose interactions at the day centres indicated they were experiencing a difficult time; and those who the staff suggested as suitable participants. The women's mental health was not formally assessed. The reason for this is that the focus of this study is not on a diagnosed mental health problem, such as depression. Using a diagnostic tool to assess mental health status of the women in this study, and hence suitability for participation in an in-depth interview, would have diverted the focus of the study to understanding the experience of mental health problem. The aim of this study is to gather data which shed light on why some women manage their old lives successfully when others fail to. The in-depth interviews provided a deeper understanding of the lives of women who were struggling to manage their daily lives. The interviews

provided an opportunity to explore difficult issues with older women particularly as this was not possible in the day centres where topics of conversation such as *struggles with life* were discouraged.

When the women volunteered to take part in an audio-taped interview they were asked where they wanted to be interviewed. The women preferred me to come to their home rather than be interviewed at the day centre and therefore taped interviews took place in the participants' home (except one which took place in a residential home where a woman was receiving respite care). The taped part of the interviews lasted one to two hours but I usually spent a whole afternoon at a participant's house. Immediately afterwards, fieldnotes were made about the interview and the transcription was carried out as soon as possible. The taped interview data for each interview consist of between twenty and ninety pages of transcribed notes on single-sided paper with double spacing and large margins on either side of the page. The accompanying data which described the interview experience included a summary of the woman's general reaction to the interview. These sets of data were about two to three pages long for each interview. The next time I met with the women at the day centre after the interviews we chatted about the experience and they all responded positively to the interview and my visit to their home. These interactions were also recorded in the fieldnotes.

The interviews began with a set of questions with the aim of revealing the women's current struggles. The interviews started with a broad open ended question to ensure the women talked about an aspect of life which was currently significant *to them*. The aim of the study is to : *compare how some women adjust positively, sometimes despite difficult circumstances, in later life and others become overwhelmed by life and do not enjoy their old age*. Common themes explored during the interviews were : *how the women viewed themselves as older women; what specifically troubled them at this time; how they were trying to manage their current experience of being overwhelmed with life; if they were experiencing depression how this experience was distinctive from their usual reactions to life; who the women gained social and emotional support from; whether any professionals were providing meaningful resources to assist the women at their time of struggle*. In addition, to encourage women to talk about their lives specifically the interviews began with questions appropriate for each woman. For example, during interactions at the day centre with Mrs I she told me that she was

depressed and I asked her directly about this during the in-depth interview. This line of questioning was not pursued with those women who did not specifically tell me that they experienced depression. Examples of opening questions are :

- *So the reason I've asked, to talk to you is because you mentioned your experience last year ... and I was just wondering if you would just tell me about last year?*
- *So that's my first question : could you tell me why you first started coming to the day centre?*
- *When I spoke to you at the day centre you talked to me about a time when you felt low, and not yourself. The reason I've asked to come and see you is so that you can tell me about that time.*

It was important to make questions individualised for the participants because some women neglected to talk about themselves and concentrated on peers' experiences or they generalised about what they thought about others' experiences of ageing.

The questions which were asked during the interviews also reflected findings from the ongoing analysis. In a study adopting the grounded theory approach the data analysis and data collection are concurrent activities. One way in which the ongoing data analysis informs the data collection is through an interview schedule which guides the data collection. In a grounded theory study, the interview schedule is not a static research tool but rather it includes questions which reflect findings discovered during the ongoing data analysis. During the analysis in this study, I looked for what aspects of the women's lives were significant to them and unanticipated aspects of the women's lives were discovered. These aspects were included as questions in revised interview schedules and were explored during subsequent interviews. For example, the analysis revealed that the women had concerns about the *state of the world today* and that *relationships with their mothers* were significant to them. After a couple of women discussed their concerns about political events in the world today and the influence of their mothers on their lives questions about these aspects of the women's lives were included in subsequent interview schedules :

- *Many of the other women I have talked to have said that the state of the world today depresses them. How do you feel about the state of society today?*
- *Many of the other women I have interviewed have talked a lot about the influence of their mothers on their lives. What sort of influence has your mother had on you?*

The interview schedules were consulted during each interview. This ensured that aspects of interest to the study were not missed out and when participants deviated from the topic of interest there was a set of questions to use to redirect the participants' responses. It was not always possible to ensure that participants talked about the topic of interest no matter how directive the line of questioning was. Some women were determined to talk about a topic of current concern to them, for example, one woman wanted to talk about her sister-in-law who she mis-trusted and another woman discussed a previous bad experience in a rest home. These topics were significant to the women and therefore were of interest to the research but it was difficult to ask about anything else because they were determined to tell me more about the topic of interest to them. The interview schedule was used as tool to try to re-focus the interview if the interaction went off track.

The interview recruiting process resulted in ten audio-taped interviews with eleven women and four in-depth interviews which were not audio-taped but after which thorough note taking was carried out. Except one of the audio-taped interviews, which took place in respite accommodation, all of these interviews were carried out in the women's homes. One of the in-depth interviews in a woman's home was not audio-taped because of a technical hitch when I did not switch on the tape recorder properly and so thorough notes were taken after the interview to record the data. Three women took part in in-depth interviews at the day centres which were not audio-taped. For various reasons these women wanted to tell me about their lives but were not willing to take part in an audio-taped interview. After each of these untaped interviews thorough note taking was carried out to record the data. One woman refused to let me tape an interview because in the past she had a bad experience after volunteering to take part in a piece of research. After informal interviews at the day centres two women were willing to take part in taped interviews but on the day I had agreed to visit them one had a fall and the other decided she was too unwell to take part. These women continued to discuss their lives with me and fieldnotes were used to record ongoing interactions with them. Other women agreed to take part but an interview with them never took place because arranging an appointment was difficult. One woman who agreed to take part in an in-depth interview on two occasions was out when I visited her house at the time we had pre-arranged. This woman was housebound and lived with her daughter. Her daughter appeared agreeable for me interview her mother but she took her mother out on the days I arranged to visit and in the end she could not

give an alternative appointment. One women volunteered but on the days she was expecting me she forgot and because her home was on the other side of the city it was difficult to keep making a new arrangement. Another women volunteered but she was too busy to track down for an interview time. Overall, fourteen women took part in in-depth interviews.

After six months at the first day centre and interviewing twelve women I decided to try recruiting volunteers at another day centre. At this day centre, I found an accessible source of volunteers for the in-depth interviews and two interviews were immediately carried out. I was at the second day centre for a shorter period and therefore adopted a different strategy for recruiting participants to in-depth interviews. I did not know the volunteers from this centre as well as I knew the ones I interviewed from the first day centre. A preliminary visit was made to the woman's home to find out about social circumstances and family relationships. The second interview was audio-taped and used to explore issues relevant to this study.

I had more difficulty recruiting participants at the first day centre than the second one and there are several reasons why this occurred. It was naïve to expect older women to respond to a letter request to take part in a study asking them to talk about their struggles in old age. I pursued this line of research because conventional studies successfully recruit participants in this way, even when researching sensitive topics (Renzetti & Lee, 1993). My experience as a nurse and others' research experience gave me the confidence to believe that older women would talk with me about their lives. The participant observation period supported this belief. During the participant observation period women revealed intimate aspects of their lives to me and sought me out to tell me about their lives. They talked freely to me without a tape recorder but it appears that I underestimated the sensitivity of the research topic because I did not expect the women to mistrust an audio-taped interview the way they did. In addition, by the end of the six month period of participation at the first day centre the women knew me well. During participant observation at the day centre I joined in with the women's daily chats and the fun they had with one another. After this long period, I lost the positive affect of anonymity I had at the start of the research. Perhaps they knew me too well and some would not have been comfortable describing their struggles with me more formally during an in-depth interview. The women might not have wanted to reveal what could be perceived as a negative side of themselves after

showing me their fun side. At the beginning of the research, I was wary about trying to persuade women who were not enthusiastically volunteering to take part. It was not until I received positive responses from the women who took part in interviews that I had the confidence to encourage other women to take part in the research. At the beginning of the research, I should not have been as cautious or fearful about forcing participants to take part as I was. I discovered that women who did not want to take part could not be persuaded otherwise. Some women were initially reluctant to take part because they did not think they had anything valuable to tell me. When I explained that their experiences were of interest to others they volunteered to take part in an interview. In contrast, at the second day centre I had immediate success in recruiting participants to take part in in-depth interviews. At the second day centre, my approach was more confident and I maintained an anonymity which was lost over a long period of participant observation at the first day centre.

Concurrent data collection and analysis

The discussion above provided an account of collecting and recording the data for this study. In the discussion which follows there is a description of the ongoing data collection and data analysis and how they become interdependent processes. Concurrent data collection and data analysis was carried on the different types of data. For me, the most significant part of this process was interrupting the fieldnote recording and interview transcribing to record analytical ideas and code the data (Glaser, 1978). This was an invaluable process which ensured that ideas about the data were recorded immediately and were not lost during the demanding task of recording the data. Word processing documents were used to record and organise the data and in other word processing documents ideas about the data were recorded to make cross-references to specific extracts of data in the fieldnotes and interview transcripts. The incident by incident and constant comparative method of data analysis was adopted and a number of concepts were identified in the data. This section includes a discussion of how the concepts were discovered in the data and how they were developed to become major categories. In addition, how a core category was discovered from the data is described.

During the data analysis two main questions were asked of each incident : *what does the incident say about the woman's experience of ageing?* and *has this incident been experienced before by the same or another participant?* The technique of theoretical

sampling was used to direct the research questions and data collection. Questions asked during data collection were derived from the findings of the ongoing data analysis. During the early stages of the research at the first day centre all interactions among the members were recorded in the participant observation fieldnotes. For example, the interactions of members with dementia were recorded because their interactions influence the dynamics of the day centres. Some members take on a caring role for those members who have difficulties remembering the routines or interacting with others. To begin with, the open topic of *understanding the lives of older women* directed data collection towards recording all interactions between members. It was not known which interactions would become relevant until the findings from the incident by incident analysis was developed. During the early stages of the research, the focus of the study is broad and all data have the *potential* to become relevant and therefore all data are coded in case this happens. As the analysis developed, theoretical sampling was adopted and only interactions among the women which were relevant to the study were recorded.

As the research progresses, the focus of the study becomes clearer and a set of concepts are identified to be explored more in depth during subsequent data collection and analysis. Interactions not elaborating the concepts which are defined as significant to the study were ignored when writing-up the fieldnotes. Some concepts interested me but had to be dropped from the study. For example, the effect of the *organisation of the day centres* on interactions between members was interesting but not relevant. As the research topic in this study became focused on understanding adjustment in later life. Interactions which did not provide greater understanding of the concept of adjustment were no longer recorded and only interactions which illustrated examples of struggling with life or managing successfully with life were recorded in the fieldnotes. When data collection was carried out a set of research questions were continually being asked to focus the data collection, fieldnote taking, and subsequent data analysis. The research questions reflected the findings from the data analysis and provided a framework to proceed with subsequent data collection.

Theoretical sampling was adopted during the research and the data collection reflected findings from the ongoing data analysis. Carrying out participant observation before conducting the taped interviews provided an opportunity to begin the analysis in an early stage of the research. This resulted in some key concepts emerging from the

participant observation data which were explored further in the in-depth interviews. Similar to Charmaz (1990) in her study of chronic illness, tentative ideas about the data emerged early on during the data collection. The in-depth interviews provided an opportunity to explore tentative ideas more fully to discover whether they were meaningful to the study. An example of how theoretical sampling directed the data collection in this study comes from the answers women gave me when they were asked about what worried them. One or two women discussed their concerns about *the state of the world today*. After this issue had been raised twice I specifically asked about it during subsequent data collection and it became apparent that this is a significant concern for older women. In addition, during the later stages of the research, data which were collected and analysed earlier were re-analysed to discover whether concepts discovered later in the research had been described by participants earlier. An example of retrospectively searching the data for examples of data which illustrate a concept is the concept of *expressing sexuality*. *Expressing sexuality* was identified as a concept significant to the women at a late stage of the research. The existing data were revisited to scrutinise them for examples of how women talked about their sexuality and to elaborate the concept further. The purpose of this process was to find out whether concepts discovered at a later stage of the research had been referred to during earlier stages of the research and what meaning could be derived from earlier references to the concepts. Concurrent data collection and data analysis, inherent in the theoretical sampling method, renders the data analysis and data collection interdependent processes. The researcher is thus enabled to integrate new and unanticipated experiences of the participants within the findings of the study and to make meaningful links between categories across all the data.

Theoretical sampling was used to develop saturation of categories from the interview and participant observation data. Saturation of the concepts developed when there was sufficient data to explain different aspects of a concept. The different aspects of a concept were revealed when participants talked about their lives to me and to other members of the day centres. The concepts were elaborated through the analysis by using different pieces of data, from the interview and participant observation data, to meaningfully explain the significance of a concept to the participants. Saturation was satisfied when a concept could be explained, sometimes using contrasting experiences of participants, across different situations. The analysis process in a study which adopts the grounded theory approach directs the researcher to look for meaningful

links between concepts. The links between concepts become abstractions about the data. Individual concepts are shown to be illustrations of a more abstract concept and when the abstract concept can be illustrated by different examples of data the concept might be considered saturated by the data.

Early during the participant observation at the second day centre the analysis revealed that categories were being saturated. *Nothing new* emerged from this period of participation and accordingly fieldnotes were not recorded for long at the second day centre. No new concepts were identified and there was no further elaboration of the concepts which had been identified from data analysis at the first day centre. Issues raised by the women from the first day centre were being repeated by women at the second day centre. Concepts identified as significant to the study at the first day centre were explored at the second day centre during conversations with the members, participant observation, and interviews. The analysis revealed that despite further data collection with women at the second day centre the data provided no elaboration of existing categories. In addition, no concepts emerged at the second day centre which had not been identified from data collection with women at the first day centre. Participant observation at the second day centre did not yield any new findings about the categories which were discovered from the data collected at the first day centre. Similar to the first day centre, the day care members of the second day centre were a group of older people from different backgrounds who were experiencing frailty in later life. Therefore, it was assumed that since *nothing new* was found at the second day centre to contribute to the concepts' diversity, the categories had been sufficiently saturated using data collected at the first day centre. The data collection ceased altogether after nine months participant observation (including nearly two months at the second day centre) and when in-depth interviews with fourteen women had been carried out.

Time between the interviews was spent becoming immersed in and analysing the interview and participant observation data. This period was invaluable for developing an understanding about how the data related. In-between interviews time was spent exploring concepts with existing interview and participant observation data and accordingly the data collection was driven by the analysis. The fieldnotes and interview transcripts which recorded the data were scrutinised using the incident by incident method to discover meaning from the data. The researcher develops ideas

about the data as the analysis proceeds and it is important to record these ideas in a systematic way in the fieldnotes. It is a task which must not be neglected by researchers who aim to show how pieces of data are related. Hammersley & Atkinson, 1996; p. 175) explain the significance of keeping detailed records of emerging ideas :

fieldnotes consist of relatively concrete descriptions of social processes and their contexts. ... [T]he main purpose is to *identify* and *develop* what seem to be the most important categories. ... It [writing of fieldnotes] is not an especially esoteric activity. On the other hand, it does constitute a central research activity and it should be carried out with as much care and self-conscious awareness as possible. ... [W]ith inadequate note-taking ... [o]nly foggy pictures result. [S]atisfactory note-taking needs to be worked at. It is a skill demanding repeated assessment of purposes and priorities ... Thus, the standard injunction, "write down what you see and hear", glosses over a number of important issues. [T]he fieldworker will want to ask *what* to write down, *how* to write it down, and *when* to write it down.

The extract above shows how important the fieldnotes become in the analysis process. Glaser (1978) explains how important it is to keep a detailed account of the analytical memos (Glaser, 1978). In this study, a record of each emerging concept was kept by using theoretical notes (TNs) to track ideas about possible links between the coded data and illustrating these ideas with data. Glaser (1978) describes recording TNs alongside raw data and using index cards to keep track of the emerging analytical ideas. In this study, separate word processing documents were used to record the raw data; the TNs along with extracts of coded data to substantiate each TN. When a concept was identified in the raw data a TN was created to record what meaning was being derived from the data. Next, the data was coded by copying it from the raw data file and placing it under the appropriate heading of a substantive or theoretical code to describe or explain ideas about the meaning of the data.

New data were either coded alongside similar incidents within an existing theoretical note or in a separate theoretical note created to record the meaning being inferred from new data which could not be matched to previously analysed data. Initially, the data were coded using substantive codes and when links between codes were discovered theoretical codes were created to illustrate the links between substantive codes. During the initial analysis, coded data were conceptualised using a substantive code which used the participants' own words to describe the data. Theoretical codes were used later during the analysis to describe theoretical links between concepts. As the research progressed, theoretical codes were used to describe abstract thinking about

concepts and went *beyond the participants' own words* to illustrate links between different concepts. As well as descriptive labels, the codes were distinguished using numerical and alphabetical coding. To begin with the numerical and alphabetical codes reflected the chronology in which the concepts were discovered but as the analysis progressed the numerical and alphabetical codes reflected analytical thinking about links between concepts. For example, 004 *don't bother others* became 004A *don't bother others*. Any new categories which were found to be related to this concept were labelled as 004B, 004C and so on, for example, 004B *keep your feelings to yourself*. When writing-up this category for the analysis chapters in this thesis the theoretical code 004 was labelled *depression isn't inevitable* (see Chapter Four). The coding began with substantive labels but as the analysis developed theoretical codes which described a link between several substantive codes were discovered. Together, the TNs and coded data consisted of about four hundred pages of transcribed notes on single-sided paper with double spacing and large margins on either side of the page.

A word processing document was also used to record the methodological notes (MNs) along with extracts of coded data to substantiate each MN. MNs are used to record ideas about the interaction between the researcher and the participants. The ways the participants constructed their stories within the interview and during participant observation are described using MNs. For example, the ways participants set the agenda of the interview and ignored cues from me was included in the MNs. Examples of *closed questions* and *missed opportunities* for exploring interesting areas were also recorded within the MNs. Recording these MNs increased my awareness of methodological issues around collecting and analysing data and facilitated a more productive period of data collection.

Another set of word processing documents was created to record a summary of the findings from the analysis and coding. The summary of ideas about the data were recorded using word document tables. In Appendix A, the final summary tables of the theoretical and substantive codes and the MNs from this study are presented. In the tables each theoretical and substantive code and each MN were listed using the descriptive label and the alphabetical and numerical code it was assigned. Links between concepts are illustrated visually by placing concepts in relative position to one other within the tables. The numerical and alphabetical codes assigned to a concept were changed during the research to reflect new ideas about the theoretical links

between concepts. The summary tables changed as the coding and analysis developed and were used to visually represent ideas about the data in this study. When new links between the theoretical and substantive codes were abstracted from the data the relative position of concepts changed in the summary tables to reflect new understanding about the data. The tables were used to summarise the current state of understanding about the data. The summary table of the theoretical and substantive codes presented in Appendix A is the eleventh version of the summary table illustrating the patterns of links between concepts. The summary tables were important for this thesis because they provided an initial framework from which to start writing-up the study. However, the final thesis does not follow the framework in the summary tables in Appendix A. Writing-up of the concepts discovered in the raw data from a study is another stage of the analysis. In this study, new theoretical links between concepts were discovered when writing-up concepts as categories when they were explicitly substantiated with pieces of raw data. The theoretical links developed in different directions than that which had been predicted from the ideas about the data recorded in the TNs. For example, some links between concepts disappeared when they could not be meaningfully substantiated with raw data or because they could not be used to enhance the meaning of the major categories. When the categories were written-up for this thesis the final summary table included a total of sixty-one substantive and theoretical codes on which to develop an understanding about the lives of older women. These broke down into three major categories and a core category which explain older women's experience of adjustment in later life.

Searching for a core category within the data was another major objective of the concurrent data collection and data analysis. The analysis provided three major categories : *explaining depression; intimacy in the lives of older women; and managing change in later life*. They describe the women's experiences of adjustment in later life. Something more meaningful than the major categories on their own was required to understand why some women manage their old lives successfully when others struggle with theirs. At this stage, inspiration for a core category is sought. Reading around the existential perspective appeared to provide a framework to develop a core category for this study. The existential perspective has been developed by gerontologists (Biggs, 1993; Thompson, 1995) to explain experiences of ageing. In the study presented here, the existential perspective provided a language to understand women's contrasting experiences of ageing. It was discovered that women who make

sense of their old lives manage a successful old age whereas those who struggle with life find it overwhelming and fail to find meaning in their old lives. The data were scrutinised to discover whether the women's experiences supported this explanation. The data chapters reveal that there is evidence to show women finding meaning in their old lives and experiencing a happy old age and others who fail to find meaning who are struggling with their old lives. These ideas were discovered by constantly comparing incident for incident and contrasting theoretical codes with one another to understand the women's experiences of ageing. I constantly asked questions about what I was trying to say about the data through the theoretical codes and recorded these in memos which were used to write-up the thesis. I strove to develop a language which brought the meaning of discrete incidents alive through the major categories and ultimately the women's overall experiences of adjustment in later life was brought together through a core category of *searching for meaning*.

Reporting the data

A collection of documents makes up the fieldnotes and data which are used in this study :

- participant observation data (ONs)
- transcriptions of taped interviews
- fieldnotes of interview data (ONs)
- theoretical notes (TNs)
- methodological notes (MNs)
- extracts of coded data

The data which appear in the analysis chapters of this thesis have been copied directly from the raw data files. Extracts from the participant observation data which appear in analysis chapters are copied from the fieldnotes. Data from the in-depth interviews which were not audio-taped were recorded in the fieldnotes in the same way as participant observation data and are used in the thesis in the same way that the participant observation data are. The audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim and sections of relevant data are copied from the transcripts into the analysis chapters. The Glossary outlines the transcription symbols used when recording the data. When writing the fieldnotes from the participant observation period it was important to

record immediate reactions about the day's fieldwork. For speed, these fieldnotes were sometimes recorded in note form and, in the main, these data have not been *cleaned up* for presentation in the thesis. Any Scots language which is used by the participants has been recorded but where expressions distract from understanding they have been *translated*. To provide the reader with a true reflection of the interaction during the interviews stutters and repetitions have not been deleted. Data separated by square brackets indicate that there is abstract thinking about the meaning of the interactions which could not be discretely recorded from the raw data. The ideas in square brackets were used to inform the TNs and MNs.

In this study, during the analysis it was discovered that there are three major categories significant to the lives of older women which affect adjustment in later life : *explaining depression; intimacy in the lives of older women; and managing change in later life*. These categories were developed through the process of analytical induction by using the grounded theory techniques of theoretical sampling and theoretical sensitivity. At the beginning of the data collection period all new data were compared incident to incident and each incident of interest was coded with a substantive label. As the data collection progressed links between the substantive codes were identified which appeared to be describing similar types of social action. A theoretical code was then used to describe a relationship between several of the substantive codes. In this thesis, the theoretical codes are elaborated with pieces of raw data which illustrate and contrast different aspects of the category.

The three major categories discussed within the analysis chapters of this thesis have been developed from the theoretical and substantive codes which made ideas about the data explicit during the earlier stages of the analysis. These codes are identified as concepts which provide understanding about the lives of older women. The substantive codes are used to describe the raw data and the theoretical codes are used to conceptualise the meaning of groups of substantive codes. It is through the theoretical codes that the major categories are developed. Theoretical codes are used to make links between concepts visible however they lack the abstract detail to establish a plausible story about the meaning of the data. A search for major categories in the data moves on the analysis from a search for theoretical codes which conceptualise groups of substantive codes to a search to capture the overall meaning of the majority of incidents recorded in the raw data. Major categories provide a more

meaningful overall understanding about the data and the lives of the participants being studied than theoretical codes. In this study, when analysing relationships within and between the theoretical codes three major categories of *explaining depression*; *intimacy in the lives of older women*; and *managing change in later life* were discovered to be significant to the lives of older women. Writing-up the theoretical codes as major categories brings the data together in an elaborate and well grounded theory. As the analysis progresses in a grounded theory study, an aim of the research is to discover whether there was a core category to explain the significance of the major categories to the participants. A core category of *searching for meaning* was discovered in this study. The properties of this core category are presented in this thesis to explain how the major categories of *explaining depression*, *intimacy in later life*, and *managing change in later life* interact to affect *adjustment in later life* among older women.

In the analysis chapters that follow, an attempt is made to make sense of the women's experiences and understand the factors which affect adjustment in later life. The reasons why some women struggle with life and others enjoy it is not immediately evident from the women's social circumstances. The analysis explores why it is that some women manage to enjoy their old age despite life's difficulties and others are unhappy in spite of having seemingly good circumstances. Wenger (1984) has studied social networks among older people. She found that it is the meaning of relationships within the networks which affect which ones are meaningful and that it is not the number of the relationships older people have which is significant. Hence, older women's circumstances might be objectively assessed as positive but are not subjectively experienced as positive by the women. In the analysis chapters, the discussion aims to reveal what aspects of life are significant to the women who took part in this study and what factors affect adjustment in later life.

Chapter Four

Searching for Meaning : A Core Category

In this study, the grounded theory approach guided the research process and an aim of the research process was to discover major categories which affect adjustment in later life among older women. Three major categories relevant to adjustment to the lives of older women were discovered : *explaining depression in later life*; *intimacy in the lives of older women*; and *managing change in later life*. In Chapter Five, each of the major categories are explained in depth. Data are used to illustrate the significance of each of the major categories to adjustment in later life among older women. Following the work of Glaser (1978), another aim of the research process is to discover a *main theme* which is common across the major categories. In this chapter, the main theme discovered in this study is explored. An explanation of the significance of the main theme precedes the chapter explaining each of the three major categories to make the relationship between the major categories explicit from the start of the presentation of the findings.

The main theme is used to identify something common across the data. It is used to explicitly state something about the participants' lives which in each of the major categories has perhaps only been hinted at. Importantly, the main theme is used to illustrate how the major categories are related. In a study which adopts the grounded theory approach the main theme is explained through a *core category*. The core category serves to explain the relationship between the major categories and provides a more meaningful understanding about the social behaviour being studied than the categories provide separately. In this study, a core category of *searching for meaning* was discovered and is used to illustrate how the relationship between the three major categories affects adjustment in later life among older women. The core category of *searching for meaning* shows how older women engage in a process of *searching for meaning* to make sense of the lives. It is hypothesised that the outcome of the *search for meaning* affects how adjustment in later life is managed. *Searching for meaning* serves to explain the relationship between the three major categories and how their interaction effects adjustment in later life. In the analysis it was discovered that *searching for meaning* was a theme hinted at by the participants but during the research it became evident that *searching for meaning* is integral to adjustment in later

life among older women. Evidence for the relevance of *searching for meaning* across each of the major categories is only hinted at in Chapter Five which explores each of the three major categories in depth. In this current chapter, , through a presentation of the core category of *searching for meaning*, the relationship between the three major categories is made explicit. This explication of the relationship, between the major categories through the core category, enhances understanding about how the major categories interact to affect adjustment in later life among older women.

The interaction between the three major categories is used to illustrate how the concept of adjustment is operationalised within the women's lives through the core category of *searching for meaning*. The process of *searching for meaning* was evident throughout the data and is implicitly referred to in this thesis within the proceeding analysis chapter. The core category was analysed across the three major categories to discover how women carry out the process of *searching for meaning* and what affect it has on adjustment in later life. The findings in this chapter are presented to illustrate how the interaction of the three major categories through the core category of *searching for meaning* affects adjustment in later life. In the final stage of the analysis, understanding about *searching for meaning* was developed by discovering the significance of *searching for meaning* within each of the major categories. Thus, understanding about *searching for meaning* is taken forward through a core category. In this study, the core category has been created by developing the significance of *searching for meaning* within each of the major categories and illustrating the interconnectedness between the major categories through a core category. The grounded theory approach guides the researcher to discover what is common about the process observed within the core category across the participants' lives. The analysis techniques used in the grounded theory approach guide the researcher to discover what the *process* of the core category is, by exploring the interaction of the major categories in a study. *Searching for meaning* was revisited across the major categories to discover what was the common process observed among the participants and state it explicitly through the core category. The analysis revealed that when the women engaged in a process of *searching for meaning* they did so regardless of physical fitness, socioeconomic position, age, mental well-being, marital status, or other demographic and social factors. Women from different backgrounds and facing different struggles engaged in a process *searching for meaning*.

Comparing the women's lives revealed that successful and unsuccessful adjustment in later life was experienced regardless of the women's circumstances. For example in this study, there were frail elderly women who were housebound and living alone and managing a successful old age and young-elderly women who were physically and socially active but struggling to find meaning in their lives and experiencing an unhappy old age. There were some women who could not make sense of their lives within any of the three major categories and they were unhappy and struggling to manage day-to-day living. Overall, most women managed to find meaning in some aspect of one of the major categories. For example, within the *intimacy in the lives of older women* category it was discovered that expressing sexuality was an aspect of the women's lives that most women were successfully adjusting to in old age. Although the women's experiences were not a dichotomy of either struggling with life or enjoying a happy old age making comparisons is a useful way of illustrating adjustment in later life. The approach presented in this study does not attempt to discover a specific range of factors which can be delineated and used to characterise types of women adjusting in later life. The comparison of *successful* and *unsuccessful* ageing is used to illustrate different ways of adjusting in later life. For example, some women were visibly struggling with life; some told me they were being treated for depression; some were quietly satisfied; some extolled the joys of life; some were quietly struggling; and so on. Different women struggled with different aspects of life in old age and they were satisfied with different aspects of their lives. Examples of women searching for meaning can be provided from each of the major categories : within *explaining depression*, women offer explanations about their experience to try to make sense of depression; within *intimacy in the lives of older women*, women tried to understand why they felt lonely; within *managing change in later life*, women tried to make sense of their current situation by comparing it to past experiences; and so on.

During the analysis when the aim was to discover what aspects of this process of *searching for meaning* were significant it became apparent that the women evaluated different aspects of their lives to make sense of their old age. This stage of the analysis led to the discovery of the *properties* of the core category. These properties were abstracted from the women's search for meaning within each of the major categories. The properties conceptualise the process of *searching for meaning* across the major categories and across women's different experiences of the major categories. The properties interact within the three major categories to illustrate the process of

searching for meaning. The properties conceptualise the aspects of the women's lives which they evaluate when trying to make sense of their experiences of old age. These properties operationalise the process of *searching for meaning* by illustrating what the women do when they engage in this process. As such, these properties are at a lesser level of abstraction than the major category or the core category but play a significant role in explaining the participants' stories. In this study, three properties of the core category have been discovered and they will be referred to as the *three properties of meaning*. The *three properties of meaning* are :

- context
- abilities
- desires

The properties were discovered by exploring the *work* that women in this study did to make sense of their lives. When the women were engaged in the process of *searching for meaning* they asked themselves questions about their life and how they experienced their life. The questions women asked themselves were compared and it was discovered that women try to make sense of their lives through *context*, *abilities*, and *desires*. These three *properties of meaning* transcend the questions women asked themselves to provide a framework for understanding older women's *searching for meaning*. Brief statements about the three properties follow here and throughout the chapter the meanings of these properties will be elaborated. *Context* is how the women perceive themselves, what image they present to others, their social environment, and their physical environment; *abilities* are the women's knowledge, capabilities, skills, and well-being; and *desires* are the women's wants, aims, and hopes.

The operationalisation of these properties through the women's *search for meaning* conceives of them being interdependent and when meaning is derived from one property it will influence meaning derived from another property. This process spirals and each time there is new meaning in any of the three properties it influences the other two. For example, when a woman experiences physical frailty : *context* will impact on frailty if daily living aids are used to assist with mobility; her changing physical *abilities* effect how she is able to get about; and her *desires* might make her determined to be independent and to overcome limitations caused by increasing frailty; and so on. When the women in this study were engaged in the process of *searching*

for meaning they carried out what is being conceptualised as an *evaluation of the properties of meaning*. Context, abilities, and desires were considered in turn and the women evaluated the impact of each of these *properties of meaning* on their lives. The process of evaluation is a dynamic one because the meanings derived from one *property of meaning* are interdependent with the other two. The women used the findings from the evaluation process to determine whether their lives made sense and whether they could derive meaning in their lives. A conclusion from this study is that those who find meaning in life manage their old lives successfully whereas those who find an unsatisfactory outcome from their evaluation of meaning are struggling to find meaning in their lives and live an unhappy old age.

Life has meaning when context, abilities, and desires *match-up*. That is, they *match-up* when the woman's context facilitates the use of her abilities, and when the fulfilment of her desires are realistic within the limits of her context and abilities. The findings from this study show that when life has meaning it is an indication that the older woman has *adjusted* to her context, abilities, and desires, as they are experienced in later life. When older women adjust to changing circumstances they experience a successful old age but when they do not adjust to changing circumstances they struggle with life and experience an unhappy old age. When older women find meaning in their life they experience a successful old age but when they fail to derive meaning from their life they experience an unhappy old age. It is hypothesised here that managing to *adjust* successfully to life's circumstances is the key to experiencing a happy old age. *Adjustment work* is what women carry out to find meaning in their lives and enjoy a happy old age. When older women do not manage to carry out successful *adjustment work* they struggle to find meaning in their lives and experience an unhappy old age. During the analysis, it was discovered that this *adjustment work* is centred around the *three properties of meaning*. When circumstances change in later life it is the women's context, abilities, and desires which change and older women who do adjustment work within each of these *properties of meaning* are more likely to ensure that their life makes sense and they experience a happy old age. Neglecting the *adjustment work* results in life no longer making sense because the three properties of meaning no longer *match-up* and an older woman increases her likelihood of experiencing an unhappy old age.

When this *adjustment work* is carried out the older woman experiences a successful and fulfilling old age because the properties of meaning *match-up*. In contrast, a *mis-match* occurs when the properties of meaning do not *match-up*. It becomes difficult for the woman to find meaning when there is a *mis-match* between the properties of meaning because life no longer makes sense. Her context, abilities and desires are out of synchrony and, for example, she might be wishing for something which is impossible to achieve within her current context and abilities. To develop desires which *match-up* with the other two properties the woman needs to recognise her new context and abilities and *adjust* her desires to her new circumstances. Alternatively, she might stick to her desires and *adjust* the properties of context and ability to meet these desires. Doing this *adjustment work* results in the woman finding meaning in life and enjoying a happy old age. When aspects of life do not make sense *adjustment work* needs to be carried out to find meaning. When the *adjustment work* is not carried out the woman does not adjust successfully in later life and does not enjoy a happy old age. When the adjustment work is neglected a sense of meaninglessness develops. This meaninglessness manifests itself in a *struggle with life*.

The properties of meaning provide understanding about adjustment in later life. Understanding of adjustment in this study is underpinned by the rationale that for older women the most significant aspects of adjustment are the three major categories : *explaining depression; intimacy in the lives of older women; and managing change in later life*. Adjustment in later life is understood by using the *properties of meaning* as a framework to explore the three major categories. When the process of *searching for meaning* is engaged in each *property of meaning* (context, abilities, and desires) is evaluated within the three major categories of adjustment. The *properties of meaning* are evaluated across the major categories of adjustment. The searching process generates understanding about whether the *properties of meaning* make sense within the three major categories of adjustment. When women evaluate context, abilities, and desires the findings from this evaluation within each of the major categories will vary and different aspects of context, abilities, and desires will be relevant to each of the major categories. For example, it is likely that the affects of a social network on finding meaning in later life, as an example of *context*, will pervade across the three major categories. The context of an inadequate social network affects an older woman experiencing depression when others tell her she *should pull yourself together* and *keep feelings to yourself*; it provides few opportunities for intimacy; and does not

provide a source of new ways of managing life when disability in later life prevents a woman doing what she usually does. Alternatively, the context of a supportive social network might facilitate a woman's ability to get out and about and her desire to spend more time with family or friends.

During the analysis it was discovered that context, abilities, and desires are evaluated independently within each of the major categories of adjustment but the meaning of one or other of the *properties of meaning* pervades across the categories. The *properties of meaning* are interdependent and therefore there is an interaction between the *properties of meaning* across the three major categories. The evaluation of one property of meaning influences another, and the affect spirals. This spiralling affect influences the *search for meaning* across the three major categories. When the woman's search is successful (*or* unsuccessful) within one of the *properties of meaning* the finding from her evaluation will have a knock-on positive (*or* negative) affect within another of the major categories when another of the *properties of meaning* are evaluated. For example, when a woman's context and abilities do (*or* do not) facilitate her desires she experiences a happy (*or* an unhappy) old age. When a woman has few (*or* many) desires the impact of context and abilities will have a smaller (*or* larger) impact. The *properties of meaning* are interdependent and when a woman engages in a search for meaning the results have an affect on her adjustment in later life. Life makes sense when the woman finds meaning within the properties of meaning and across the three major categories. The women who do *adjustment work* when the properties of meaning within the major categories do not make sense will experience meaning in their lives.

Findings from the women's *search for meaning* structures the woman's *adjustment work*. This is how *searching for meaning* affects adjustment in later life. The findings from a search for meaning determine whether the woman is successfully adjusting in life. When meaning is lacking the findings from the search for meaning structure the resultant *adjustment work*. The evaluation of each *property of meaning* affects what adjustment work the older woman carries out to make her life make sense. It is hypothesised here that the core category of *searching for meaning* is operationalised through the interaction of the three major categories. The outcome of the interaction between the three major categories facilitates adjustment in later life by providing a structure for the *adjustment work* to be carried out following the evaluation of the

properties of meaning. The three *properties of meaning* are used to understand how women try to find meaning within the areas of the three major categories of adjustment, and thus structure any necessary *adjustment work*. In this way, the core category, through the properties of context, abilities, and desires, influences the management of adjustment in later life for older women.

Existential perspective and adjustment in later life

When individuals ignore factors which have an affect on their lives they experience *bad faith* (Yalom, 1980). To live an authentic life individuals must acknowledge their *being in the world* and take this into account when interacting in the world. In this thesis, the three *properties of meaning* have emerged as the aspects of life which individuals evaluate to understand their being in the world. When the women derive meaning from their lives, through an evaluation of the *properties of meaning*, their search provides them with insight into what *adjustment work* they must do to acknowledge their being in the world and hence live an authentic life. When the three properties of meaning are not evaluated they risk living in ignorance and in *bad faith*. Bad faith causes distress because individuals have not acknowledged the forces which act on them. Their interactions are carried out regardless of their *being in the world*, or in spite of context, abilities or desires. Actions will not have their expected consequence if individuals are unaware of their context, abilities and desires, or their *being in the world*. Acknowledging their being in the world prepares individuals to interact authentically, or genuinely. When individuals have knowledge about their being in the world when they interact they can attempt to take into account all factors which they find are significant to them.

Yalom (1980) explains that we have the *freedom* to choose how to act and can be dignified in stressful situations by deciding how to experience these situations. The consequences of ignoring context, abilities, and desires can be illustrated using Yalom's (1980) example of someone drowning. Being ignorant of context, abilities, and desires can be compared to being ignorant of the water in which you are drowning (see p.21). Individuals have the freedom to act authentically but unless they become aware of their context, abilities, and desires acting authentically is not possible. We must know what we are up against before we are able to equip ourselves emotionally and psychologically to positively face what we encounter in life. When individuals

evaluate their meaning they can use the findings from this search to determine how to adjust to their context, abilities, and desires.

Making sense in old age requires that individuals recognise factors which affect their adjustment and account for these factors when seeking understanding about self in later life. When parts of the self (in this thesis : context, abilities, and desires) are neglected it is difficult to develop a sense of meaning. Some older people ignore their context, abilities, and desires with the consequence that they live an inauthentic life. Self-awareness leads to actions which take account of context, abilities, and desires, and an increased chance of living a fulfilling life. This existential perspective on meaning does not require a passive acceptance of one's life to live authentically but to live within one's limits. For example, women who determinedly challenge the stereotypes of ageing have evaluated their context and decide to challenge the context of ageism through their being in the world. These women draw on various resources to be able to challenge the status quo. Women who ignore their context could choose an assertive path but they must acknowledge what their context, abilities, and desires are, before they can make a decision about how to experience old age. When context, abilities, and desires are recognised in old age the adjustment work does not have to be adjusting to stereotypical images of ageing. In the next part of this chapter the three *properties of meaning* will be discussed in detail.

Context

Recognising context is significant because older women might not be able to change the context they live (Biggs, 1993). Biggs (1993) explains that older people need to become aware of their social context and its affects before they can take action which takes account of this context. The women in this study who carried out the *evaluation* tasks of *context* improved their likelihood of adjusting in later life. Those who ignored their context did not adjust in later life because they did not acknowledge new restrictions or opportunities in their lives. Some refused to face up to their new context and consequently were frustrated by it. Women who refused to do this context work found that life did not make sense because they yearned for how it used to be. These women were living in bad faith because there was a mis-match between their context, abilities, and desires. They did not acknowledge the limitations which existed and tried to live outwith these limits. In contrast, those women who acknowledged their

context, evaluated it and carried out the necessary adjustment work and enjoyed a happy old age.

Abilities

Women engaging in their world also have to acknowledge and evaluate personal abilities when interacting in the world to ensure they live authentically. Ignorance of abilities and limitations has similar consequences as ignoring context. Women who do not acknowledge their abilities become frustrated when their abilities do not enable them to do what they ask of themselves. For example, when physical frailty is experienced older women have to evaluate their abilities and their adjustment work acknowledges their reduced physical abilities. Adjustment in later life requires that older women acknowledge that their abilities have changed. Importantly, this should include evaluating new abilities gained from having lived a long life. In this study, women who celebrated their old lives did not do so through their current abilities. The women reminisced and legitimated their place in the world by acknowledging their past abilities and who they used to be. Even the strong characters who challenged stereotypical attitudes about old age did not celebrate *being old*. These women celebrated their old age because of who they had been and did not acknowledge any current abilities.

Within the abilities property of meaning women who struggle with life are women who try to live life as they have always done and experience failure because their abilities have changed. Those who successfully adjust in later life recognise their changing abilities and make adjustments when they have found resources with which to manage life in a different way. For example, these women accept practical help with day-to-day living and do not think negatively about being dependant on others because this *dependency* enhances the quality of their daily living. In contrast, others try hard to deny their physical frailty and only reluctantly accept help after they have exhausted themselves trying to manage independently. Women who struggle on without support do not want to think of themselves as *at that stage yet*. These women deny their declining abilities because recognising this is a sign that they are old. This study and others (Thompson et al., 1990) illustrate that chronologically old people deny being *old* unless frailty is experienced. Frailty is associated with being *old* and older women describe themselves as old when their abilities match stereotypical images of old age. Those women who accept help evaluate their abilities and their

concomitant *adjustment work* is to accept the consequences of being labelled as old when they accept help to support their changing abilities. Whereas those who resist being labelled as old are trying to deny that they are old. Accepting the label of *old* is difficult because it is negatively associated with images of being a burden. Those who manage to adjust to the affects of being called old benefit because they receive homecare which improves their quality of daily living. Those who are distressed by being labelled *old* ignore their limitations and reject offers of help with the consequence that they struggle with life and are unhappy in their old age. Women who do not adjust to their abilities, because for them it heralds the beginning of old age which they are trying to resist, live an inauthentic life and struggle with meaning. Those who evaluate their abilities, and accept the consequences of receiving and being labelled as old, have done the necessary adjustment work and are more likely to live a happy old age.

Desires

The third property of meaning is desire. This third property has a special role in adjustment in later life because for some women adjustment to desires might be the key to a successful old age. *Desires* play a pivotal role between *context* and *abilities*. If desires are not adjusted with respect to context and abilities the older woman becomes frustrated and angry. If the woman does not adjust her desires she might never find meaning in her life. Her desires have to reflect her context and abilities because her context and abilities are the resources she draws on to realise her desires. When her desires are ideals she might be encouraged to seek and stretch her context and abilities to overcome previously perceived barriers. For this stretching to take place adjustment work has to be done within the *context* and *abilities* properties.

When there is a mis-match between desires, contexts, and abilities the older woman runs the risk of becoming chronically dissatisfied. Some of the women in this study appeared to be chronically dissatisfied. When they did not change their desires they could not experience their desires because they did not do the necessary adjustment work within the context and abilities properties. For some women, the only adjustment work they can do is within the desires property because they might not have an influence over their context or abilities. Context is sometimes difficult to change because it involves reliance on others to also change and abilities might be restricted by chronic illness or increasing frailty. It is difficult for an older woman to

relinquish her desires but it might be essential for adjustment in later life and a happy old age.

Adjustment in the desire property requires becoming satisfied by desires which at face value do not appear to be potentially fulfilling desires, for example an infrequent visit from a friend or family member. Later in life even small desires, such as watching television or listening to the radio, might not be achievable if hearing or sight begin to deteriorate. As women age, context and abilities change and it becomes difficult to maintain favoured desires because of the impact of context and abilities on the property of desire. For desires to be meaningful women must adjust to the changes in context and abilities in ways which facilitate the experiencing of their desires. Alternatively, if adjustment to context and abilities cannot facilitate their desires women must adjust their desires to within the limits of context and abilities. Without this adjustment work life does not make sense and women remain unfulfilled.

Managing adjustment

The three properties of meaning are interdependent with no hierarchy of importance between the properties. As one aspect of a woman's life changes there will be a concomitant affect on the other *properties of meaning*. The woman must adjust to these changes as they occur. If the adjustment work is not carried out distress occurs when the woman tries to meet unrealistic expectations of herself. It is hypothesised that adjustment is said to have occurred when the balance between a woman's context, abilities, and desires are appropriately adjusted to reflect changes in any one of the *properties of meaning*. Adjustment is indicated when the woman recognises changes in her life and accommodates these changes within the expectations she has for herself. When an older woman evaluates her context, abilities, and desires and does the necessary adjustment work her life makes sense and she experiences a successful old age.

The three properties of the core category interact to affect each woman's search for meaning. She considers each of the properties and evaluates whether she is satisfied with her life. Ignoring the impact of one property on another will have a negative outcome and the woman will live in what the existentialists describe as *bad faith*. In later life, the process of *searching for meaning* is difficult to manage because in old age a person's context, abilities, and desires change often and in significant ways. To

live authentically and experience successful adjustment in later life older people need to do a lot of psychological and emotional adjustment work to keep up with the changes and make the three properties of meaning match-up. Those who are well adjusted have carried out appropriate adjustment work following an evaluation of all three properties of meaning during their search for meaning and understand their *being in the world*. The women who are enjoying their old age have acknowledged their being in the world, evaluated the interaction between context, abilities, and desires, carried out the appropriate adjustment work, and for them life has meaning. When women do not evaluate the properties of meaning or when appropriate adjustment work is not carried out life does not make sense and they struggle in old age. When women do not engage in an evaluation of the three properties of meaning or they do not do any adjustment work they remain ignorant of the impact of their context, abilities, and desires. They remain ignorant of the limitations of context and abilities and refuse to relinquish their current desires. Below, each of the three major categories discovered in this study : *explaining depression*; *intimacy in the lives of older women*; and *managing change in later life* are elaborated through the three properties of meaning. Older women's *searching for meaning* within each of the three major categories is explicitly developed as a way of understanding adjusting in later life. In Chapter Five, the three major categories are explored in depth using data to illustrate the significance of each of the major categories to adjustment in later life among older women.

Explaining depression

Individuals who experience depression search for meaning and like others sometimes fail to find meaning in their lives. A sense of meaninglessness can be a manifestation of depressive illness and therefore it would not be surprising to find that older women who experience depression do not adjust in old age. Individuals with depression tend to perceive life negatively and therefore their evaluation of context, abilities, and desires will be negative. Consequently, any adjustment that is carried out by an older woman with depression is based on false assumptions about her self. In these circumstances, *searching for meaning* among those with depression is bound to fail. There are going to be mis-matches between the properties of meaning because they are evaluated at a time when the woman's full awareness of context, abilities, and desires is eclipsed by her depressive illness. Older women who experience depression (and her friends and family) recognise that there is a mis-match and tries to make sense of

the experience. The women (and her friend or family) wonder about past context, makes comparisons about her current experience with others in similar circumstances, and tries to understand why she is not enjoying a successful old age.

Evaluating context, abilities, and desires becomes problematic when an individual is suffering from depression, as some of the participants in this study were. When a person experiences depression their thinking becomes negatively distorted and they are unable to accurately evaluate their context, abilities, and desires. Blazer (1993) explains that a sense of meaninglessness is a manifestation of depressive illness but he does not explicitly describe how someone with depression develops a sense of meaninglessness. Reference to the three *properties of meaning* is used here to understand why someone with depression experiences a sense of meaninglessness.

In this study, friends and family of women with depression made an evaluation of a woman's life and initially offer strategies which they think will *cheer up* their friend or family member. The woman's negative thought processes frustrate friends and family and they lose interest in trying to help. When the attempts to cheer up the women fail the women are given a period of grace after which time they are expected to *pull themselves together*. Those close to women with depression find it hard to understand why their friend or family member cannot manage as everyone else does. Friends and family carry out a proxy search for meaning and evaluate the woman's context, abilities, and desires. When the results of their search find no reason why the women should not manage their lives positively the family become impatient with the woman and discourage her from discussing her struggles.

The women themselves find it difficult to understand why they are overwhelmed by life. The women compare themselves to their peers and discover that there are others *worse off than me* and that they are *no worse than others*. The women struggle to find a reason why they are not managing in later life as others are. Friends' and family's frustrations with them confirm that they are doing something wrong. The women make sense of their experience by blaming personality flaws as the reason for their current reaction to life. The women's desires sometimes mis-match their context and abilities because although they are physically frail they yearn to go on holiday as they used to or enjoy a dance the way they used to. The women do not adequately take account of their context and blame their abilities for not managing to adjust

Intimacy in the lives of older women

The properties of meaning interacted within the category of *intimacy in the lives of older women* to reveal whether the women could make sense of their relationships. The women engaged in an evaluation of this aspect of their lives to discover what adjustment work needed to be carried out to find meaning in their relationships. Some women were able to do the necessary adjustment work when they experienced a change in their circumstance and hence were enjoying a successful happy old age. For example, one woman found great joy in her new budgie. She lived alone and was physically frail and managed to find intimacy in her life through her budgie. Others struggled with intimacy and failed to find meaning in their relationships.

This category is problematic because it is difficult to suggest what adjustment work women could do to make sense of any mis-matches between context, abilities, and desires within intimacy. When women experience loneliness and isolation they might be unable to adjust to this difficult circumstance. For example, the women in this study who are lonely and isolated have tried to ameliorate or anticipate this problem by going to the day centre to increase their opportunities for social contacts. Astonishingly, one woman listed twenty different groups and activities she had tried. Within the groups of women at the day centres, there were examples of women who lived alone and were socially isolated but who did not become lonely. In contrast, there were women who were socially active but who felt lonely. The women who felt lonely needed to do adjustment work within the property of desire to set new expectations or do adjustment work which would facilitate new social skills within the abilities property. Adjusting context (going to the day centre) had not provided a solution to their difficulties with intimacy and therefore to find meaning they had to work on the other two properties of meaning.

Some women understood why they were lonely because they had lost their *own people*. Whereas others who had been widowed many years ago could not make sense of their current longing for intimacy because for years they had enjoyed their own company and it was only now that they were struggling with intimacy in their lives. One woman longed to have a day by the sea by herself and another desperately missed the intimacy she used to share with her pets. Others were adjusting successfully and trying out different strategies to facilitate intimacy in their lives. The women who were successfully adjusting managed to find sources of intimacy in later life they

consequence trying to answer these questions is stressful. The existential perspective focuses on recognising *being in the world* and does not recognise the usefulness of wondering why. Within the existential perspective individuals need to make sense of their place in the world to find meaning in life rather than asking why they are where they are. In this study, some women referred to their faith to answer these difficult to answer questions but the existential perspective discourages individuals from asking that question because finding a satisfactory answer about *why* is difficult. Distress can be alleviated by asking different questions and by focusing on understanding *being in the world* rather than asking *why* questions. Living authentically focuses an individual's attention on recognising what influences are affecting their being in the world. In this thesis, it is hypothesised that older women manage change in later life and find meaning in life when they evaluate their *context*, *abilities* and *desires* to successfully adjust to the changes they are experiencing.

Older women who evaluate the changes they are experiencing and do the appropriate adjustment work within the three properties of meaning find meaning in later life. In later life, adjustment to change is problematic because an older person experiences many changes and continual evaluation work is necessary. Some of the women in this study did not engage in the process of *searching for meaning* and therefore they were unlikely to find meaning in their lives because they did not begin to do the necessary adjustment work to manage changes in later life. Some women were exhausted by life because *what happens to you in life affects you and you never get back up* after a distressing event. Others were enjoying a successful old age because they *bounced back* and *kept hope*, no matter what happened to them. Older women's resources change in later life and they need to find new resources to draw on to adjust to the changes they are experiencing. Evaluating *context*, *abilities* and *desires* provides older women with a structured approach to understanding what new resources would be useful for successfully adjusting to the changes of later life they are experiencing.

Summary

In this chapter, the analysis was used to present an understanding of the ways in which older women experience adjustment in later life through a process of *searching for meaning* around three *properties of meaning* of context, abilities and desires. Most conversations I had with the women at the day centres were about day-to-day living and how it has changed in later life. The analysis revealed that there were three major

categories significant to adjustment in later life among older women : *explaining depression*; *intimacy in the lives of older women*; and *managing change in later life*. A core category of *searching for meaning* was discovered and illustrates how the three major categories interact to affect adjustment in later life among older women. The findings from the study presented here have shown that circumstances are not the most significant factor affecting a woman's satisfaction in later life. Some women who were physically and socially active described having difficulty in later life and some women who were housebound and physically frail extolled the joys of life. Generating these contrasting stories was possible because the participant observation was carried out at a day centre where women in different situations came independently to taught classes or were bussed-in to receive day care. Searching for meaning explains the pattern in behaviour across the three major categories and thus across the different circumstances which the women in this study experienced.

The findings from the women's search for meaning, which is facilitated through their evaluation of context, abilities, and desires, structures their adjustment work. When this adjustment work is carried out the women enjoy a successful old age but when it is ignored or cannot be carried out (for example if the woman is suffering from depression) the women experience *bad faith*. When older women experience bad faith and live an inauthentic life it is difficult for them to finding meaning in later life because they do not recognise the potentials and limitations of their self and their *being in the world*. Carrying out appropriate *adjustment work* is necessary to live an authentic life and begin to find meaning in later life. This study shows that, *regardless of circumstance*, when older women's adjustment work is structured around the three *properties of meaning* and ensure that the properties of meaning *match-up* a successful happy old age can be experienced.

Chapter Five

Understanding Adjustment in Later Life

In this study, three major categories significant to adjustment in later life among older women were discovered. The three major categories are : *explaining depression*; *intimacy in the lives of older women*; and *managing change in later life*. In the previous chapter, the core category *searching for meaning* was explored and there was an illustration of how the women in this study engaged in the process of searching for meaning within each of the three major categories. An interaction between the three major categories through the core category was explained and it was used to show how the interaction affects adjustment in later life among older women. In this chapter the relationship between the three major categories is not made explicit and each of the three major categories are presented separately. However, the main theme of *searching for meaning* is alluded to in an implicit way in each of the sections describing a major category. The aim of this chapter is to illustrate what aspects of the major categories are significant to adjustment in later life among older women. The data analysis is used to illustrate different aspects of each of the major categories which it was discovered the participants found significant to adjustment in later life. Explaining depression is presented first, followed by intimacy in the lives of older women, and finishing with managing change in later life.

Explaining Depression

In this chapter, the data are used to show how depression in later life is explained by the members and staff of the day centres where the research was carried out. This topic was raised when I was explaining my study to the members of the day centres and staff when they asked about my work and when volunteers were being recruited for the in-depth interviews. To get across ideas about adjustment and struggling with life to the members and staff at the day centres I used depressive illness as an example of a reaction that can develop when someone is struggling to manage their life. Depression is presented here as a manifestation of a struggle with adjustment in later life because the women who experience depression fail to enjoy their old lives. Presenting the example of depression generated interesting discussions among the participants. Women suffering from depression talked about their experience. Some

women who were successfully adjusting in old age made suggestions for others who were not to help them enjoy life as they did. Exploring the experience of depression also revealed that some women were experiencing symptoms of depression but did not acknowledge their symptoms.

The women in this study come from various backgrounds and have had different life experiences. No common cause of depression was found among those who described their depression or those who experienced depressive symptoms. The major category of *explaining depression* was discovered from the data which illustrated women's experiences of depression and others' interpretation of depression in later life. Explanations of depression were offered by those members who displayed signs of depression as well as the staff and women who were enjoying a successful old age. These explanations were recorded in the fieldnotes and the data are used here to illustrate how women with symptoms of depression and others explain their experience. The data are used to show how those women who are struggling with adjustment in later life and experience depression make sense of their struggle and how others interpret these women's experiences.

Understanding of the major category *explaining depression* is explained using various theoretical concepts which were discovered in the data. In this chapter, some of the concepts which are included were not derived from experiences which the women would have labelled as depression. Few of the women who were struggling to adjust in later life described their experience as depression. However, when some of these women's experiences were recorded in the fieldnotes it became apparent that if a practitioner were to use a scale or tool to assess the women's mental health the practitioner would discover that some of them were experiencing depression. Therefore, the analysis in this chapter is presented with the knowledge that the data have been derived from some women experiencing depression. I used my clinical experience and academic understanding of depression to analyse the data. It can be shown that the older women in this study who were experiencing depression were reluctant to recognise and sometimes denied that they were experiencing depression. This finding is replicated in other groups of older people experiencing depression and it makes diagnosis and treatment of late life depression difficult, particularly among older women (Evans & Burgess, 1994).

Signs of depression

First, a description of what depression looks like in the women who took part in this research. The women did not always explicitly state that they were depressed but depressive illness among older people presents in a characteristic way and older people have a tendency to deny feelings of depression and instead become physically pre-occupied (Baldwin, 1991a). It is hypothesised here that the behaviour of some of the women who denied being depressed could be classified as depressive illness using the Diagnostic Statistical Manual for psychiatric illnesses (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Depressive illness is difficult to identify in older people and in particular older women (Evans & Burgess, 1994). Therefore, it is useful to provide examples of data which illustrate this experience. Conversations with Mrs L are used to illustrate one woman's experience of depression. In Appendix B, interactions with Mrs L during the research are presented to illustrate the progress of her depression over time. In this study, it was found that the women were reluctant to admit that they were suffering depressive symptoms. Analysis of the data reveals that women talked openly to me but when I enquired about the way they were feeling and thinking about themselves some of them denied that depression could be used to describe their experiences. When the women talked about their lives it was evident that they were experiencing a number of depressive symptoms. The analysis revealed that some women hid their distress and presented a façade that they experienced a successful old age. The following extracts of data are used to illustrate that despite denying it some women in the study were experiencing depression. This evidence is equivocal but sufficiently substantial to support the hypothesis. These extracts of data are interesting to present because practitioners are required to detect depression in older people who deny they are depressed and present a falsely negative image of themselves.

During the in-depth interviews I asked women whether they thought they were depressed Miss D and Mrs E answered this question by describing practitioners' opinions of the state of their health. These two women told me about an incident when they were in hospital recently being treated for an acute physical illness. Staff from the hospitals used a screening tool to assess whether they were depressed. The extract below illustrates what happened to Miss D :

VT: (.....) When were you at the hospital? ...

Miss D: Yes, and then they sent me to the day centre at em, the hospital.

VT: Mmmhuh.

Miss D: And it was the sister there or no the staff NURSE, and one of the physiotherapists ah think said to me, "Oh ah think you're depressed. Tell the doctor to give you something." That's how it came and the, the STAFF nurse put all the quizzes on me with, "Did ah get depressed?" and "Did ah feel like takin ma life?" and all these things [laughing].

VT: And what did you say to her?

Miss D: Well ah said, "NO to them all." Ah mean ah get discouraged at times but that phew, was all never gettin any relief of pains.

It appears that professionals who cared for Miss D when she was admitted to hospital when she fractured her hip recognised that Miss D was showing signs of depressive illness. Miss D does not recognise that her experiences of being *discouraged at times* are signs that she is depressed. She does not think it is appropriate for her to receive treatment for depressive illness because what others perceive as symptoms of depressive illness are to her acceptable reactions to her current circumstances, for example chronic pain. The women recognised as struggling with life and asked to participate in this study had been identified as possibly suffering from depressive illness by other practitioners who they encountered.

In later life, somatic symptoms of depression might be confused with physical ailments (Steiner & Marcopulos, 1991) and hypochondrial behaviour is a common symptom of depression (Baldwin, 1988; Katona & Livingstone, 1997). Therefore, late onset depression is difficult to diagnose because it is confused with physical complaints. For example, Miss D complains of intractable chronic pain and does not recognise her experience as depression. Baldwin (1988) explains that it is common for older people who experience depression to minimise feelings of sadness and instead become physically preoccupied. Another example of a physical complaint which might be described as a symptom of depression is provided by Mrs A and Mrs K. They both recounted a distressing story about an episode of incontinence that they experienced out on a day trip. These women no longer go on day trips and explain their incidents as the reason they no longer go. It was difficult to assess whether their concern about experiencing another episode of incontinence prevented them going on another trip or whether it was an excuse not to go on another trip. A sign of depression is social withdrawal and therefore these women might have not wanted to socialise and used this incident as a legitimate reason not to go out. At the same time, the incidents were distressing and the women could have a genuine fear about going on another trip.

These women both talked about their incident for a long time and provided me with exact details about what happened. Talking about yesterday's lunch and its effects on their bowel functioning was a favoured topic of conversation. It might be concluded that this preoccupation is a sign of depression. Mrs A describes her incident of incontinence :

Mrs A: Ah wis oot once or twice, but eh, when ah had the bowel eh when that wis a NERVOUS shock really wis exhausting. And off course since then ah've no notion to go anywhere, and ah didnae go to Strawberry Tea for the same thing when ah didnae want to go, in case something happened. And ma daughter got one or two things fae Boots for me but they're no the right things they're maybe for the bladder, you ken?

VT: //Right.]

Mrs A: //But] ah'm not too bad as long as the toilet's near.

VT: Mmmhuh.

Mrs A: ... But the, the bowels gaein way ootside wis a SHOCK.

VT: Uhuh.

Mrs A: And off course, to me it wis a big shock.

VT: And you've not really been able to get over that?

Mrs A: No yet no no. It's constantly in ma thoughts.

VT: Uhuh.

Mrs A: ... It's only one and only time that //happened,] you ken? ...

VT: So this could happen during the day as well I suppose?

Mrs A: //Yes.]

VT: //Is that] what you're thinking?

Mrs A: Yes. That's what ah'm saying ah like to be where there toilet.

Blazer (1993) explains that *loss of interest* is the single most significant sign of late life depression and women in this study explained that they had lost interest in doing their favourite things. Mrs E said she had lost the *zest* for doing things she enjoyed because they *don't have the same kick*. Mrs M could not understand why she is not bothered about watching television even though she is at home alone and feels lonely. Mrs K

was not looking forward Christmas and was no longer bothered about having alcohol which she usually enjoys :

Mrs K: ... [I]t seems tae be the beginning o the month it's the end o the month. And normally by this time, ah have aw ma [Christmas] cards and everything aw ready just tae pit in the pillar box.

VT: Mmmhuh. But you can't be bothered?

Mrs K: Ah think ah've got about a dozen, and that's aw the family. It's no even aw the family ah've still two tae write fir the family yet. And that's before ah start going anywhere else.

VT: Your friends and cousins //and.]

Mrs K: //Just] just no INTERESTED in Christmas this year. Ah wouldnae care even if ah never went tae a Christmas dinner or anything.

VT: And //by the sounds.]

Mrs K: //Tae me] it's just another day.

VT: By the sounds of it that's really not like you.

Mrs K: N't.

VT: You like to have a good time?

Mrs K: Oh well ah like a good time right enough //but.]

VT: //But] this year you just?

Mrs K: The thing is wi the legs being useless you cannae enjoy any FUN. You just sit back in a corner.

VT: Uhuh.

Mrs K: Ken? Cos even at, ah didnae even couldnae even get up fir ma grandson's wedding. Ah just got sat at a table and that was you. Mind it didnae stop me fae drinkin. Supposed tae have two glasses o white wine ah think ah musta been nearer twenty-two. Well there was ma stepson was there, ma two son-in-laws was there. Ma granddaughter's man. And it wis just a case o, "What you havin gran?" And Linda shout, "White wine." Ah says, "Are you on the white wine anaw?" She says, "It's no fir me it's for you." [laughing].

VT: Keeping you topped up?

Mrs K: Keeping me, "Oh," ah says, "God ah'll no be able to walk oot o here." Christ ah wis neither up not doon.

VT: It didn't have an effect on you?

Mrs K: No. Ah wis neither up nor doon. Ah expected ma sugar tae,
[blood sugar level] but it didnae. N't.

Keep smiling / Pull yourself together

Members gave advice to those suffering with depression. They explained how they prevented depression happening to them when they faced difficult circumstances. A very vocal woman, Anne, offered advice to others across the large room at the day centre. She suggested doing puzzles to distract attention away from worrying events. Anne told me that thirty years ago she suffered from depression and therefore was qualified to offer advice to those who were experiencing something similar. She regularly proclaimed that she was glad to be alive :

Anne mistook me for an "old buddy" today! Jean said, "There's nothing wrong with that. There's a lot of good things about being old." She said you get your pension, and if you are financially secure you have no worries. Jean and Anne began to have a conversation about what it means to be old across the big room. Anne agreed that you just had to look in the mirror everyday and thank God for another day. Anne said if you've got your friends you're also OK. Jean said, "Well, I didn't expect to live this long."

April, p. 26

A theme which was found to be reoccurring in the data was the expectation that those who were depressed could *pull themselves together* and *keep smiling*. Some members believed that this strategy would alleviate and prevent depression. Anne made loud comments in the day centre which implied an unsympathetic attitude about her peers who were not able to pull themselves together and lift their depression. She had managed to do it when she suffered from depression and expected others to do the same. Extracts from conversations with Anne illustrate the type of unsympathetic reactions which people with depression face day-to-day. Anne also felt able to give advice to women who were grieving for partners :

Dorothy talks with some members about her grief after her husband died. Anne tells Dorothy that she should, "Pull herself together and start appreciating life." The woman tries to explain her loss by saying it is only six months since her husband died and that they were married for thirty-four years. Anne replies that she was married for fifty-five years [implying that if she can get over the loss, Dorothy should also be able to get over the loss.] The woman goes on to explain that it was a sudden loss, and it is taking time to get over the loss. Anne, again, had a reply for Dorothy. She says, "Well they are better gone than

suffering.” [I don’t think the other women there appreciate these comments.]

June, p. 35

Grief is not the same experience as depression but individuals experiencing either of these require support and understanding from others while they discover strategies to manage their circumstances. Individuals experiencing grief are expected to pull themselves together after a particular period just as people with depression are expected to do. This period is defined by other people’s perceptions of an appropriate time for being upset. Analysis of the data shows that the women are expected to cheer up after peers and their families judge that this period has lapsed. Reactions which are prolonged are perceived as abnormal and not tolerated. Some of the staff and the teachers at the centres held similar views to the members’. The staff are not specifically trained to provide support for those with mental health problems and therefore it would be understandable for the staff to be unaware of the support someone with depression requires. Their views probably reflect views held by the public. Overall, staff were supportive to all members but one member of staff suggested that those with depression let it happen to them :

Fiona said it was up to the person whether they became depressed or not. [she compared different people at the centre, to give examples of the effects of different personalities]. She said some people sat back and let things happen. While others were determined not to let things just happen.

April, p. 35

It was shown, using the data above, that members and staff show impatience towards those who are suffering depressive illness when they do not pull themselves together. Some members also discourage others from expressing feelings of vulnerability. The members are expected to keep their feelings to themselves. An example of this comes from an interaction between Mrs A and her friends at the day centre. Mrs A has developed a few friendships with women at the day centre. On the days that these women come to the day centre they sit together all day and chat about their lives. They discuss personal aspects of their lives and joke along with one another. One of the women, Yvonne, diverted the conversation when there was a hint of depressing talk. Yvonne revealed that she believes expressing negative feelings accentuates feelings of sadness and topics which might be sad should be avoided. She explained that her life is satisfactory because she uses humour to keep her mood uplifted. On one

occasion when Mrs A was discussing the difficulties of living alone Yvonne said, "Oh but you just use your sense of humour." Yvonne wants Mrs A to stay cheerful and she thinks that one strategy is to discourage her telling negative stories :

Yvonne seems to downplay Mrs A's ill-health. Quite a number of times Mrs A tries to tell Yvonne that she regrets rejoining the lunch club, but Yvonne doesn't ever let her finish. Yvonne wants nobody to moan. She wants everyone to keep smiling. She is a very jolly woman, and wants people to be content. But perhaps she also prevents *any* discussion of low morale.] She kept saying you have to keep smiling, otherwise you would just break down and give up.

May, p. 31

Yvonne also told Mrs A that she should not give up but should keep making an effort :

she recalled the frustration that develops when you try and thread a needle. I said, "Don't you use a needle threader?" And she said that threading a needle was still as difficult, even with a needle threader. Mrs A said, "Oh I gave that up at the beginning." [the beginning of being blind - both women are registered blind]. Yvonne said, "You've just got to keep trying."

May, p. 67

On this same day, Yvonne started to say she was annoyed about the way day trip places were allocated at the day centre. The day centres arrange day trips for the frail elderly but because Yvonne is able to come to the day centre on public transport she cannot go on the trips. She said that although she was registered blind this did not count as being disabled. Yvonne did not elaborate about why she felt neglected by the day centre and instead explained that moaning affects people's relationships negatively and should be avoided.

These reactions were typical of the women at the day centres. Another woman who had been away from the day centre for a long time was asked how she was feeling and she said, "I'm doing fine, but things have been bad recently. No worse than anyone else though dear!" The members make an effort not to burden one another. Therefore, women who are experiencing depression are discouraged from expressing their concerns and difficulties. Some of the members become good friends but do not confide in one another. For example, Mrs A and Yvonne are friends but there is a tension between them when Mrs A starts to recount stories about her ailing body. Findings from the interviews reveal that the women do not have anyone to share their

problems with and consequently they feel isolated. When I asked Mrs A who she spoke to when she was feeling low she replied, “Naebody. Just maself hen.” Below is an extract of interview data is used to illustrate another women’s lack of confiding relationship :

VT: Mrs K can I ask you, who do you sort of talk about your nerves being, //on edge] just now?

Mrs K: //Naebody.]

VT: Nobody?

Mrs K: N’t.

VT: Is that because. Why is that?

Mrs K: Eh, dunno.

VT: Do you not talk about these sorts of things with people?

Mrs K: Mebbe mention in that if, tae ma daughter.

VT: Right.

Mrs K: But no AW the time. You know?

The interview and participant observation data provide different perspectives of women’s experiences and these perspectives are used together to develop a broader understanding of the category. When the participant observation data are analysed independently it is revealed that relationships at the day centres do not fulfil a supportive role. Without the added insight gained from analysis of the interview data this finding might not have been interpreted as being significant to women’s lives. It would not have become apparent whether the women had other relationships to draw on. Analysis of the interview data revealed that some women had no one to could confide in at home and at the day centres, members discouraged others discussing their frustrations. Therefore, at the day centres there was not an opportunity to develop supportive relationships because discussions of vulnerabilities were not sanctioned by the members. In the section *Intimacy in the Lives of Older Women* in this chapter the data are used to show that when the women do not have a meaningful friendship they miss it.

Nobody understands

Throughout this section, it has been suggested that other people show impatience towards those who experience depression. In this study, it was found that women who experience depression in later life sensed others' lack of understanding and examples from the interview data presented below illustrate this lack of understanding. In contrast, some members and staff tried to understand how those who were struggling with life experienced old age. For example, some members who had experienced a difficult time themselves showed empathy towards those who were struggling with life.

First, examples which show what it is like to receive unsympathetic responses from family and friends. The women found that friends and family became impatient with them because despite efforts to try to cheer up the women the depression persists. The women sense that their behaviour frustrates their family and friends. Mrs E explains that when she is feeling down she is reluctant to talk to one of her sisters because her sister dismisses Mrs E's feelings as being just like everyone's else's :

VT: It's hard if you're staying in all day and you don't go out.

Mrs E: That's right and it used to be such a busy house [...] and ah've lost an awful lot of friends. LONG TIME friends they've all PASSED over. Good friends //of] ma lost aw them.

VT: //Mmmhuh.]

Mrs E: But that's how it that's inevitable i'n't it?

VT: Sounds like you've got a sturdy family though if you and all your brothers and sisters are still, living.

Mrs E: Well ah've got a sister a brother-in-law in Musselburgh.

VT: Mmmhuh.

Mrs E: And a sister in Mid Calder. She MIGHT be in today she comes OCCASIONALLY, but you didnae say your no well tae her. You know? She, "Everybody feels like that sometimes" [smiling].

And later during the interview

Mrs E: Aye even the family, aye and ma sister in Mid Calder she doesnae come very often she says, she comes here she'll mebbe be here YET, [Mrs E was waiting for her sister when I

arrived for the interview] she goes to the hospital the hairdresser along there so she might be here yet. She's got aw the troubles in the world you know what ah mean? [smiling].

Mrs E explains that she misses no longer having her life long friends since they have all died. VT points out that her brothers and sisters are still alive and wonders if Mrs E's family provide her with an alternative support system. Mrs E explains that she has tried to talk to one of her sisters about how she is feeling but this has been unsuccessful because her sister is not interested. Mrs E's sister uses her own experiences of feeling down to dismiss Mrs E's complaints as over reactions. It is difficult for those who are not depressed to understand why people experiencing depressive symptoms are unable to *snap out of it* as they do when they are feeling down. Mrs E realises that her sister does not understand how she was feeling and her sister's lack of support distresses Mrs E.

Mrs M emphasised the distress that her daughter's lack of understanding caused her. Since Mrs M was admitted to hospital for treatment of depression her daughter has avoided contact with her mother. Mrs M has experienced a series of distressing events, such as being widowed twice and nursing her second husband at home until he died. In addition, she suffers from chronic illnesses. Despite knowing about these events Mrs M's daughter is unable to sympathise about her mother's depressive illness. Mrs M tries to talk to her daughter about the way she is feeling but her daughter asks her to stop :

Mrs M started off her talk with me by saying, "To let you understand a lot of things have happened to me. There's been a lot of deaths. And I've had to cope with it all by myself". The daughter in Edinburgh tells her mother to, "Come on now, just pull yourself together, don't get depressed." Mrs M resents her daughter's comments. Mrs M says she just doesn't understand the depression. ... Mrs M also talks a lot about the fact that no-one understands what it's like. People just keep saying, "Pull yourself out of it, and don't get depressed."

April, p. 32

The data presented in this chapter are used to show that peers, family and friends, and staff at the day centre believe that those with depression should pull themselves together and keep smiling through troubled times. Those who experience depression sense this lack of understanding and it causes them distress. Few people give the women time to talk about the way they are feeling. This problem is significant in later life because as people grow old lifelong friends and close family members die and

their support resources diminish. A reason why family and friends might find it difficult to provide support to those who are experiencing depression is that the person with depression requires emotional support. Someone with depression needs a lot of support to get through each day and family and friends might find it difficult to provide the level of support the person with depression demands. When individuals feel *off* on the odd day and suggestions are made about how to lift their low mood there is a reward for the person making the suggestion because the person is likely to cheer up. When someone is depressed, it is disheartening for family and friends who make suggestions which are continually rebuffed. Individuals with depression do not have the inclination to help themselves because the illness negatively affects their self-interest and they do not act on well-meaning suggestions. A chronic cycle of frustration develops. Family and friends lose interest in the person with depression, this disinterest makes the person's experience of depression worse, and the person with depression complains that their family and friends do not try to understand what they are going through.

Empathic understanding and showing sympathy

In contrast to the examples presented above, some members and staff drew on their own experiences and showed empathy towards those who were experiencing depression to try to understand what it is like to be depressed. For example, those who had suffered greatly when they were widowed remembered how low they had felt at this time and guessed that their experience of grief is similar to depression. One group of women who I introduced the study to were particularly understanding about those who become depressed in later life. These women did not dismiss those who do not manage to pull themselves together. For example, one woman understood how easy it could be to become dependent on alcohol at times when life is a daily struggle. The extract below has been adapted from data which described the group's interactions after I had introduced the study to them :

I spoke to Irene and Wilma, who had both been depressed when they were widowed, but had managed to pull themselves together. They said it was all about having good friends and being able to get out and about. They had a lot of empathy for folk who did not manage to "pull themselves together". They didn't dismiss folk who do become depressed as others at the day centre do

Irene had lost her husband suddenly, and everyone commented on how well she had coped with her new situation. This volunteer didn't

expect *everyone* had the capacity to do this. She said she drew on past experiences to cope with it, for example when her husband was away for the war. She also had the help of a lot of friends.

Irene and Wilma suggested that taking to drink when you were depressed was a sign of weakness. Another woman disagreed with them. She said some nights there are times when you just aren't in the mood to do anything and you can feel really really lonely. To take to drink is not a weakness, but a natural / understandable reaction to a particular situation.

April, p. 36

One of the staff, Jo, explained that it is difficult to imagine what depression is like if you have not experienced it. In addition, she said that it is difficult to imagine situations which become so overwhelming that individuals become depressed and to understand when they find it impossible to *pull themselves together*. This member of staff tries to show understanding about someone who experiences depression by explaining to herself that it is a legitimate illness. Jo struggles with legitimising depression though because she cannot ever imagine not being able to pull through difficult situations as she has done during her life. The extract below is taken from a conversation she had with me :

Jo said, ... "it is a real illness isn't it?" She said that she thought that unless you have actually experienced depression, you can't understand it. She said, that we all get down but we pull ourselves together, But she said she realised that it was a real illness, but can't imagine how you get in a situation where you can't "pull yourself together."

June, p. 30

Jo talked about a close relative who had recently experienced depression. She tried to be sympathetic, understanding and supportive. However, when she discovered that her relative's depression was caused by work pressures she told me that she dismissed her relative's reaction as being over the top. This example illustrates how difficult it is for even a supportive relative to empathise with those who experience depression. Older women with depression face responses like Jo's. Few of the women's friends and relatives understand their experience and even supportive relatives, such as Jo appears to be, find it difficult to maintain a supportive level of sympathy.

Explaining Depression

During the interviews, the women offered explanations about what they thought had caused them to be feeling the way they were. Throughout Mrs E's interview, she tried to explain the way she was feeling by reviewing her situation and trying to find a satisfactory explanation for her reaction to it. Below are some extracts from her interview with which illustrate her attempts to explain her situation :

... (.....) Ah'm NOT too bad dear ah think you see when you when you're not get rid o your ENERGY, that's like if you're out if you feel bad and you can WALK, you can eh you know it's takes all that tension way? ...

... Aye no. Just sometimes, wish ah could get out and ABOUT and. (.....) [sniff] Ah don't think TOO much about the past sometimes ah do ah can think o the happy times ah had, but eh sometimes ah don't. (.....) Ah've no money worries. ...

... No ah just used to get too much time to think, you know?

But ah suppose all what happens to you in life affects you. And then you dinnae want to get bitter if you act, make things worse.

Ah think o what happens in you life DOES affect your thinking. Think so. That's how it goes lass. If you just had a wee bit mair, up and get up and go. As most of them [women at the day centres] that we've heard say, "You've got to accept it."

She [doctor] thinks that was the start o aw ma troubles you know? But when you hear about what other people have eh? Aye, you feel, "Why should you moan?" ...

But you can phone them [son and daughter-in-law] but? But and ah realise there's an awful lot worse than me. What was your question again? But and ah realise there's an awful lot worse than me.

Oh big changes. So if there's something on the television thats helps you know? But eh. Och, ah really ah'm no too bad dear, an awful lot worse than me.

Mrs E

Mrs E asks herself why she is feeling anxious and low in mood but cannot find an answer to her question because her circumstances are no worse than anyone else's. Referring to difficult circumstances as the reason for developing depression is not an adequate explanation for Mrs E because she perceives that others are worse off than she is. The bottom three paragraphs of the extract above illustrate this aspect in the

women's search for an example of trying to explain their experience. An alternative explanation is sought and like other women in this study Mrs E explains her depression as the consequence of personality traits. The section below presents examples of personality traits which the women suggest as explanations for their depression.

Explaining away the experience of depression as a personality trait

The women are not satisfied with using their difficult circumstances to explain their depression. This conclusion is supported by family, friends, and staff and members of the day centres, who show impatience towards those who express their feelings of vulnerability. The data can be used to show that women internalised these negative attitudes about depression and the consequence is that they try to *explain away* their experience and blame themselves for their depression. One way they do this is by explaining their experience as a negative personality trait. Particular circumstances cause the women to feel vulnerable and overwhelmed with life but they wonder what has caused this reaction. The women try to find explanations for the way they are feeling because other women in similar circumstances manage to adapt positively to old age. The women want to find a reason why they become overwhelmed with life and search their personality for reasons why they have reacted in the way they have. This explanation has the consequence of *explaining away* their experience of depression.

Staff at the day centre also *explained away* women's depressive symptoms as a negative personality trait. After data collection was finished, I visited the day centres to talk about the research with the staff. The staff told me that Mrs I had moved out of her own home into a nursing home. This woman was physically frail and received homecare to live at home. Over time, she became less able to manage and the staff were not surprised that Mrs I had moved into a nursing home. They thought that Mrs I had received sufficient support for living at home but she did not have the right attitude to overcome a physical disability. The staff said that Mrs I felt sorry for herself and was not positive about the help she received.

Staff at the day centre assessed Mrs I's situation and decided that the poor outcome had occurred because of her negative attitude. Mrs I's complaints of not managing at home were explained away as arising from her negative personality trait. Mrs I's experience of being unable to manage at home was not legitimised as understandable

in her situation because she was receiving what was considered adequate support. The staff found that although Mrs I claimed she wanted to stay at home she was not helping herself to achieve this goal. Mrs I's complaints were not recognised as a sign that the support she was receiving was not appropriate.

Some women suggested they were currently feeling as they did because they were chronic worriers. The women explained that they worried unnecessarily because their worries were not legitimate. Objectively, the women consider their lives satisfactory but when they start to think about the details of their situation they begin to worry. When Mrs A and Mrs E are asked to give examples of what they worry about they explain that they worry about everything and anything. These two women suggest that this is how they have always been. Mrs A says that her son tells her she looks for something to worry about if she ever finds she has nothing to worry about. She agrees with her son and during the interview tells me how things go round and round in her mind and she is unable to stop them :

VT: See when you were saying you were restless at night, is it that you can't sleep, or? What what's happening there?

Mrs A: Well ah think it's a lot tae dae wi nerves. //Restless] you ken?

VT: What sort of, do things go through your mind?

Mrs A: Oh ma mind's constantly working.

VT: Uhuh. What sort of things //worry you?]

Mrs A: //Ach,] ach, everything and aw thing, ah've got, ma youngest son says the hardest o ma worry is looking for a worry [smiling].

VT: Have you always been like that?

Mrs A: Yes.

And later during the interview :

VT: Aye. Well, the other question is, what sort of things, you know, make your worries worse? Or, what sort of things bring on your worries?

Mrs A: Well nothin brings them on they just come.

VT: Uhuh.

Mrs A: They just come. An ah mean ah've nothin to worry about, ah've really nothin to worry about.

VT: But you just, sometimes that happens //doesn't it?]

Mrs A: //Your brain] //goes round] and round. Goes round. If you get a subject and you go on, if you go and start on thinkin if you dinnae go to sleep right practically right away, you go tae bed an you start on thinkin o something and it accumulates.

VT: Yeah. Night time's terrible for that?

Mrs A: Oh aye. In fact ah'm gettin ah'm gettin now lately even wi the radio on an ma, talkin book on an plenty, no concentrate the on the on beginnin to, ken? Half way ma mind wonders. An thing. Least wee least wee thing.

VT: And you didn't do that before?

Mrs A: No, ah've been doin that lately.

VT: Mmmhuh.

Mrs A: Just that ah've no. The only thing is if ah've a talkin book on, an ah'm concentrating ah fa asleep. [Small laugh]

VT: Small laugh.

Mrs A: If ah'm concentrating, but ah don't concentrate the same as ah used tae.

VT: And is it, is it kinda your body things that your thinking about your, legs and whatever or?

Mrs A: Everything an aw thing. Everything an aw thing.

VT: Mmmhuh.

Mrs A: (.....) No, no, really, ah've really nothin to worry ah always say that when ah'm sitting here in the chair comfortable, "Ah feel fine." Ah've nothin wrong wi me, [laugh] til ah start an move.

The extracts above show that Mrs A has always been a worrier but recently her worrying has become worse and she is finding it difficult to concentrate on her talking books and listening to the radio. Mrs A thinks she has nothing to worry about, perhaps this is because her family and friends tell her this. Mrs A denies that any of her worries are legitimate. She is experiencing a difficult time because for example, she is housebound, has lost contact with her best friend when her friend moved into residential accommodation, she is physically frail, and so on. She uses this flaw in her

character as the reason she is not managing well. Mrs A does not acknowledge that this is a difficult time in her life and she needs support to manage it.

The extract below shows that Mrs G blames herself for being too sensitive to other people's negative reactions to her when she is depressed. When Mrs G experienced negative reactions she explained that she is a sensitive person and consequently reacted badly to their attitudes towards her. She explains her reaction as a personality trait. She does not acknowledge that when she was unwell and received unsympathetic responses from others it would have been understandable to feel upset. Similar to the other women, Mrs G explains her reactions as a personality defect. Mrs G does not acknowledge that living in an *atmosphere you could cut with a knife* would be difficult for most people. Rather, Mrs G explains that she is a sensitive person and therefore it was difficult for her to continue living where she was. She thinks that she is a difficult person. Mrs G is annoyed with the other women in the residential home but the reason she gets upset is because she is too sensitive. Mrs G minimises her experience because from past experiences she knows she is a sensitive type and therefore might be over-reacting to the situation :

VT: Was it a difficult transition moving here [residential home]
//were you in your own house?]

Mrs G: //Not really not really no.]

VT: //No?]

Mrs G: Ah'll tell you why [cough]. Ah've known this residential home since 1982. Ah had a friend that eh was actually she was the assistant matron round in another residential home round the corner and eh and she was a very very good friend of mine. And unfortunately she died in 1991. And ah had been round in the other residential home since 1989 till 1991. But [laugh] unfortunately one of the ladies didn't care FOR me from the first time ah went in and she was the next bedroom to me [laugh]. So when ah took the depressions ah took them round there quite a lot. She made me very nervous VT and ah felt well, "Ah'll have to get out." You know?

VT: Right.

Mrs G: So ah told ma son ah says eh, "Ah'll have to get out," ah said, "ah CAN'T stand this atmosphere at the table [slapping hands] there just six of us at the table." You could've cut it with a knife. And [cough]. Ah think ah'm a very sensitive person //and] ah don't like an atmosphere, and eh so my son

said ah says, "Ah want to go back to ma flat" [where she lived for a period before into the residential home where is now living].

The women do not legitimise their reactions to situations and blame themselves for the way they experience their later life. They do not acknowledge that their circumstances are difficult. The women try to make sense of their lives and one way is to refer to their personality traits. The women who took part in in-depth interviews dismiss their experiences as being the consequence of negative personality traits, and the staff dismiss Mrs I's reaction to physical frailty as a negative personality trait. The women experience difficult situations and have not adjusted to them successfully. This is understandable but not inevitable. Other women faced with similar circumstances manage to adjust successfully and these women explain their reaction to their situation as a personality defect. The women try to understand their experience and they explain it away as a tendency to over-react.

The state of the world today

Some of the women told me that they worried a lot and listed world and political matters as things which weighed on their minds. When describing depressive illness in later life Blazer (1993) discusses the significance of world matters on the lives of older people. Using Erikson's (1978; 1986) work on the significance of integration in old age, Blazer (1993) draws conclusions that older people who are experiencing depression might become frustrated with the world today. He suggests that older people with depression are glad to know that they do not have long left to live because of the way they perceive the world has turned out. He says that older people want to leave something positive behind them and they are not proud of the changes which have occurred in the world over their lifetime. The findings from the data in this study contrast Blazer's (1993) view. Women described their worries about the world and they were sad about things that happen. However, their sadness was not associated with regrets about not having left something positive behind them. Political events made them feel sad because they sympathised with the people on the television and in newspaper reports who were suffering. The women perceived these events as distressing because of the suffering which was experienced by others. In this study, the women did not worry whether their generation leaving a negative legacy behind them. In the following extract, Miss J talks about the political events and world matters which worry her :

VT: Do you in the evenings do you worry about things?

Miss J: Sometimes.

VT: What sort of things do you think about?

Miss J: (.....) Well mebbe. (.....) Ah don't know but, what's gonna happen to the world and that? [laughing].

VT: Really?

Miss J: Uhuh. Like ah feel THIS way that. We should do something for THEM like that are homeless and eh. We should do a lot, to HELP the homeless. Ah feel as if we should CLEAN up our streets better. ... Look how people are mugged and that? And children being molested and that, and you wonder what's gonna happen?

VT: Yeah.

Miss J: (.....) Like ah mean, ah say to maself, "We should have more faith in God." And do something for them. And ah think the church has kinda coming to its senses and em. Kicking its HEALS a bit, //more.]

VT: //Do] you it's becoming more socially aware //would you say?]

Miss J: //Yes uhuh,] uhuh.

VT: Right. And it's important for the church to do that?

Miss J: Yes, yes.

VT: Right. (.....) The other ladies I've spoken to have said similar things to you about, you know they worry about what's happening in the world?

Miss J: Yes, yes ah feel like if we could get together and sort of PLAN something.

VT: Mmmhuh?

Miss J: Like em there now. Education.

VT: //Right.]

Miss J: //The government] is sort of eh cutting down in education well and and, they're not giving the eh children like the schools are eh crumbling DOWN because they can't afford to eh to patch up the ceilings and that.

VT: Yeah.

Miss J: (.....) And they make it a, a better life for the for the children in SCHOOL.

VT: Yeah it's not a very positive atmosphere is it //if the school itself is crumbling?]

Miss J: //No, no.] Yes uhuh.

VT: The building?

Miss J: Uhuh. (.....) And there you read in the paper about eh, the floods in the schools, the ceilings coming down and that.

VT: Yeah.

Miss J: And the government said, "Oh we can't afford it." They'll just have to afford.

VT: Yeah.

Miss J: (.....) Ah wonder when they'll gonna have a general election?

The extract above comes from one piece of continuous conversation. Miss J worries about different political matters and she lists them during this interview. The women in this study are upset by world and political events because this is a vulnerable time in their life where everything seems to overwhelm them and gets on top of them. The women who took part in the in-depth interviews were sensitive to many aspects of their lives and world and political matters had the affect of upsetting them. Other examples of things the women worried about were the situation of developing countries and Nazi experiments during the Second World War. Most women talked about the affect of these events on those who experienced them.

These women do not seem to have ambitions about their ability to influence the state of the world, which contrasts Blazer's (1993) explanations about the meaning of world events to elders who are depressed. Blazer (1993) suggests that older people want to think that they have made a difference to the world and if they do not think this has happened it is depressing for them. Blazer's (1993) assumptions are derived from Erikson's (1978; 1986) theory of ageing. Erikson presumes that older people *want to make a difference*. Not all individuals have a need to know that they or their peers have had a positive influence on the world before they die.

The women from the day centre lived in Edinburgh during the Second World War. They told me stories of fleeing through the streets with a pram during an air raid and finding their home had been bombed when they arrived there. These women experienced devastating experiences during the Second World War and this experience must have had an affect on their perception of the way they interact within the world.

They told the stories to give me insight into the different things that they had experienced over the years. They were not saddened by their generation's involvement with the Second World War and they did not wish that they had been able to do something to change what ha happened.

The women at the day centre also commented on daily news reports in the press. In the mornings at the day centres, day care members swapped the daily newspapers and discussed particular stories. They were upset by some of the stories but they did not display a doom and gloom picture of the world. The women believed that there were *some nasty sorts out there* but they did not think these individuals' behaviour reflected the way the world is today. They were not disappointed in how the world had turned out. Those who were experiencing depressive symptoms seemed more sensitive to world matters. This increased awareness of the suffering of others did not manifest itself in a sense of doom about the way the world has turned out or a relief that when they die they will no longer be part of it. They were upset by others' suffering

Intimacy in Lives of Older Women

In this section of the chapter, intimacy in the lives of older women is explored. From the analysis of the data in this study intimacy was developed as a major category significant to adjustment in later life. Rice (1995) explains that as we grow old our dependency on others increases and this dependency includes emotional dependency :

In later life, most people increase their dependence on other people, whether it is related to an increased need for concrete assistance because of failing physical abilities or for emotional assistance to fulfil needs left by interpersonal losses.

(Rice, 1995; p. 55)

Data are used in this section to illustrate the consequences of increased dependency in later life, on intimacy in the lives of older women. The findings show that when dependency on others increases finding adequate sources of intimacy becomes problematic. The data were used to show that intimacy can be a source of great comfort and a lack results in sadness and loneliness. Some of the women who were experiencing difficulties adjusting in later life experienced social isolation and felt neglected by their social network. Jerrome (1993b) explains that intimate relationships meet a number of needs, including personal support, sociability, physical and emotional intimacy, and stimulation. When an older woman does not have opportunities for intimacy there is a risk that these needs are not met and she is likely to be unfulfilled in life.

The significance of intimacy in this study supports previous research which has demonstrated the significance of personal relationships on older people's well-being. Murphy (1982) found that the lack of a confiding relationship has a significant affect on psychiatric well-being in old age. She found, as Brown & Harris (1978) found in young women, that when the provoking agents of depression are present a confiding relationship can protect against the risk of developing depression. Jerrome (1993b) has carried out a number of studies on friendships and concludes that when sources of intimacy become attenuated it is to the detriment of a woman's health, her capacity for social involvement, and general well-being. In this study, four aspects of intimacy were discovered to be significant for developing meaningful relationships. These were : sharing time with others, being alone, the influence of living arrangements, and

expressing sexuality. These four aspects of intimacy in the lives of older women are discussed below.

Sharing time with others : Looking forward to meeting friends and family

During the interviews, when the women were asked what they looked forward to they said spending time with family and friends. Among the things they mentioned was phoning friends and family, going out for the day, going on holiday, and so on. Intimate relationships were a source of enjoyment and the women in this study talked about the benefits of their relationships with friends and family. For example, Mrs C told me that she had days when she felt depressed and when I asked her about one particular day that I had noticed she looked down she told me about a good experience she had the day before. Her family had visited her and she had a lot of fun with which had made her happy :

VT: Well last Monday when we saw you and you weren't. What was happening?

Mrs C: Ah don't know what came over me, NOW yesterday, ma husband's [Mrs C is a widow] got two nieces, they're sisters ... my sister-in-law and HER daughter ME and the two of them, and we have a good old chatter and a cup of tea [laughing]. So we were there yesterday.

VT: //Mmm.]

Mrs C: //We] had a good laugh yesterday. You know? They told us what they had been doing and my sister-in-law's been in Portugal, with her NEPHEW and her daughter and her husband been in Portugal but in different parts, but they were telling us all their business saw the album. ...

VT: Mmmhuh.

Mrs C: ... So, made a good day.

VT: So things like that are //helpful?]

Mrs C: //Oh] it helps! Greatly it helps.

VT: Mmm.

Mrs C: JUST a blether.

VT: Yeah.

Mrs C: And a laugh.

The extract above illustrates that sharing time with family is a source of fulfilment for Mrs C. She is happy on the days she spends time with her family. She enjoys listening to their stories and joking with them. On the days when she does not spend time with her family or her friends she is sometimes miserable. During the in-depth interview with her I asked whether she could explain the way she was feeling on the days she is depressed and she referred to the previous day when she had a lot of fun. Mrs C lives by herself and gets lonely when she spends time on her own. She has friends and a supportive family but sometimes when they are not there she feels miserable. Meeting up with them and sharing time with them makes her happy. Another woman, Miss D describes going out with her friend as something she enjoys doing and looks forward to :

VT: (.....) What sort of things em, make you feel GOOD?
You know what sort of things do you look forward to?

Miss D: Oh when ma friend when she's free she tries to come once a week but she's a busy person and ah enjoy she takes me out for a run somewhere, down to Silverknowes or. Even sometimes it's just, a way out by Hunter's Tryst [on the edge of the city] she does shopping in the car, Safeway there and ah enjoy gettin in the and ah can walk round for a BIT and see some things it's awful when you're never in a SHOP and you get, you don't know what you could get and then they've got a wee CAFE and enjoy cup o nice coffee there and a wee cake, ah always enjoy that.

The two extracts above illustrate that sharing time with others is an important part of the women's life. Wenger (1984; 1991) found that the quality of family relationships and friendships are more significant than the number or nearness of friends and family in the older person's social network. In contrast, in this study it was discovered that when women are physically frail the nearness of friends and family is significant. These women cannot make visits to friends and family and have to rely on people visiting them. This is likely to happen less when members of the woman's social network are not geographically near her. The women enjoy spending time with friends and family and going on trips with them. Jerrome (1993b) explains that the functions of intimate relationships are sociability and stimulation. Frail older women who took part in this study had fewer opportunities than physically fitter older women had to spend time with their friends because physical disabilities restricted their activities. As a consequence, when close friends moved they lost them from their social network. Changes in family circumstances also affect the dynamics of the women's social

network and opportunities for intimacy. For example, when the women talked about the things they looked forward to they sometimes gave examples of activities which they did in the past. Changes in circumstances prevented them doing their favourite activities. Mrs C told me she looked forward to spending time with her nieces but since her nieces had married there were less opportunities to do this :

VT: And what sort of things do you look forward to?

Mrs C: Just gettin out, //now] ah mean now //ah] used gad about but no now.

VT: //Mmm.] //Yeah.]

Mrs C: Aye just to go out. Well you see when ma niece and her GIRLS were single, EACH one used to take, their mum and dad and me always out mebbe once a month for a meal.

VT: Mmmhuh.

Mrs C: Slap up meal, oh we used to look forward to that [laughing]. But when they got married of course they had no MONEY //but] we used to look forward to that.

Another woman, Mrs A, is suffering the loss of two close friends, one died and one moved into a residential home from her social network. In addition, in the near future her sister was moving away. Mrs A is very much missing her friend who moved into residential care. They used to phone each other every night to joke together about their daily complaints. When this friend moved into residential care they stopped phoning each other because the friend does not have a phone in her room and it was awkward to arrange times to phone each other. In the extract below Mrs A describes the difficulties she has keeping in touch with her friend. Although Mrs A does not appear to have a close relationship with her sister they phone each other every night and her sister pops in for a quick visit now and again. These losses are exaggerated because Mrs A does not have anyone else who she can talk to and she is disgruntled by her family's disinterest :

VT: What about chatting to your sister and your daughter-in-law? If you've got somebody do you sometimes talk about it and then feel relax you know a bit more relaxed after that? Or?

Mrs A: Well ah feel at night eh, ah've got in the habit o ah used to have a great friend, she's in eh what d'you call it? Residential home. And we phoned, every night, one another. Oh and

some nights an hour and a half we were on, the two o us
would blether, wi aw oor sair bits, you ken?

VT: Aye.

Mrs A: And eh, ah enjoyed it well she went intae residential home.
Well, she's an outside phone, she hasnae her ain phone, so it's
no worth it time they go and look fir her she might be oot, or
one thing and another. So she has, well she phoned me now
and again but it's stopped. But ma sister ah usually phone her
every night about six o'clock, back o six, cheap time. And
some nights we blether a lot an sometimes eh ah've nothing to
say. And eh she's talkin about her grandchildren or one thing
and another, or about her house. But eh, we're never very
long about very rarely we're mair than ten minutes if we are
that, you know?

VT: Mmmhuh.

Mrs A: And off course daughter-in-law again, ma daughter-in-law,
she's busy she's got er, other things, tae dae. She'll just say,
"Have you had a good night or a bad night?" You ken? So,
[coughing] that's about the length o ma subject ah tell er, she,
before she never listened ah think ah had too many
complaints. She used to cut me off [laughing].

VT: Right.

Mrs A: You ken? But now eh. Ah dunnae complain, ah just sit and
take it [laughing]. She just asks if ah had a good night or a
bad night and ah tell er, an how [...] night ah wis up since
five o'clock or seven o'clock and, for a few nights there ah
wis sleepin tae about nine o'clock, wakening about four or
five but lately ah dunnae ken whit's wrong wi me lately ah've
no been havin as good a nights as wis havin but. Ah think the
weather's no helpin any.

The extract above shows that friends share their worries and have fun about them with each other. Mrs A has not found a replacement source of intimacy which her friendship fulfilled. Family members phone her regularly but they do not want to chat about how Mrs A's day has gone and *aw her sair bits* which she did with her friend. Mrs A feels isolated because she has no-one to share her worries with and has found no-one willing to listen to her. When one of Mrs A's friends died and another moved house her social world and opportunities for sharing intimacy immediately shrunk. She had a small social network made up a few close acquaintances and the loss of two friends left her feeling isolated and vulnerable. The extracts presented above show how women's opportunities for intimacy are affected by others' changing circumstances. The affects on older women are significant because the number of changes increases in old age and the resources to compensate for these changes are

reduced if frailty is experienced when family and friends die. Sharing time with others is important for older women and when they do not have adequate opportunities for sharing time with family and friends they become sad and unable to enjoy their old lives.

The significance of living arrangements

The women discussed the affect of living arrangements on their relationships and opportunities for intimacy. Most of the participants in the in-depth interviews lived alone. The two exceptions were Mrs E who lived with her sibling and Mrs N who lived with her partner. It is of interest to note that neither of these women mentioned the people they were living with as a source of intimacy. Mrs E, found her living arrangements difficult because she was living with her sibling who was physically fitter than her. One problem Mrs E encountered was feeling a burden to her sibling because at the time I interviewed her she often felt miserable and was concerned that her sibling must get fed up with her low moods. Mrs E uses a zimmer to get about and because the zimmer gets stuck in the doorway of her bathroom and she no longer has a bath because she cannot get the door closed and is conscious of her lack of privacy. Mrs is E grateful that she lives with her sibling because she is reassured that if she had an accident he would be there to help but he provides no resources for intimacy :

VT: What about your SIBLING, who lives with, can you CONFIDE in him?

Mrs E: Well no really. Oh ah feel ah'm a nuisance sometimes. You know what ah mean? He must get fed up seeing ME. [Sniff] But he's been with me since [...], about twenty YEARS And he must get a wee bit fed up with me too, he must.

VT: Oh?

Mrs E: With him bein a bachelor he's no had eh. WELL ah mean a married man's a WEE bit more a, had you know what ah mean a //different lifestyle.] [Mumbles for (.....)] Best to take it a day at a time lass.

The extract above illustrates that living with others might not promote adequate sources of intimacy. In addition, Mrs K had tried living with her daughter and son-in-law. This experience was not successful because each time her family wanted to discuss something they considered to be private they asked Mrs K to go to her room or they tried to find somewhere private in the house to talk. During this time, Mrs K had a fall and got trapped in her bedroom which caused the family a lot of stress. After a

time, Mrs K moved into sheltered housing near her daughter. In the sheltered housing Mrs K lives independently but with the security of on-site help. Living with her daughter was difficult because the family relationships were strained and the fall incident frightened them. Again, these examples support Wenger's (1984) findings that nearness is not a significant factor in understanding the impact of social networks on the well-being of an older person.

Neighbours

The analysis revealed that neighbours were a significant factor in intimacy in the lives of older women. The example which is used first is Mrs I's experience of intimacy with her neighbours. Mrs I expected her neighbours to show concern for her and complained because they did not. Mrs I told me about a neighbour who was her friend and it might be that she is disappointed that her current neighbours are not as friendly as her previous ones. She misses her neighbour who used to come over to her house every Saturday night. She feels a sense of isolation despite living on a stair with people coming and going. She never sees her neighbours, she cannot go out and see them, and they never come and see her :

Mrs I: Ah WOULD. And of course ah have a FRIEND in the next BLOCK. And she died she took a stroke and then died, and that upset me terrible.

VT: Right.

Mrs I: She used to come and see me EVERY Saturday night, from the next block //you know?]

VT: //Mmmhuh.] Did you just meet her here?

Mrs I: Uhuh, //mmmhuh.]

VT: //And you] just got on well?

Mrs I: We got on well mmmhuh. ...

VT: Wee Saturday night parties? [laughing].

Mrs I: No she used to come every Saturday night [laughing]. Well ah wouldnae say it was parties but we used to sit and have a good chat, you know?

And later during the interview

VT: Does do does anybody NOTICE when you're feeling low, do they ask YOU about it?

Mrs I: N't nope. Ma minister brought me these flowers and these yellow ones in the hall //out] there, on Monday.

VT: //Mmm.] They're nice.

Mrs I: And ah phone ah managed to phone im. Thank im for them.

VT: Do you ever WISH people would say how're you feeling.

Mrs I: Well there's not ONE in the stair ever asks me, NOT ONE.

VT: Are they older people as well or is it a mixture?

Mrs I: It's a mixture, mmmhuh. In fact one the neighbour that was here when ah came she's left here now.

Miss D expressed the opposite view to Mrs I. Miss D was bothered too much by her neighbours. Miss D is housebound and her neighbours visit her to make sure she is all right and keep her company. She does not enjoy their company and gets annoyed with them but tries to tolerate their company because they do some gardening for her. Miss D has always enjoyed her own company but due to her increasing physical frailty she can no longer go on bus trips or go walking which she used to enjoy. Being housebound is frustrating for Miss D because when her neighbours visit she cannot go out and she has to listen to their stories. In the extract below Miss D describes her frustrations :

VT: (.....) What about your neighbours do you see them at all?

Miss D: AH have one neighbour there she's comes in, [laughing] nearly everyday to see how ah am //SHE'S] a very kind sole but she sits and talks about, er own affairs or brothers and about the past and her husband [laughing] and you know? THINGS that aren't NOT much interest to me and she goes on and on about the same things often, but she's very kind. She's old too and she's up stairs and er legs, but she's. Finds it difficult going up THESE are funny stairs here, they're very awkward CURVING round.

And later during the interview

Miss D:(.....) Well ah've a problem of course with ma GARDEN [sharp intake of breath]. The lady next-door she's a great one and she was cutting the grass but she's, sort of

funny person. One o the others on the other SIDE came and CUT some o the, old BUDS an ma, ROSE it's a great big rose it's just covered.

VT: //Right.]

Miss D://With] all at once and then the great pile of ones and she cut some of them, and that put her OFF if somebody else was doin she wasnae gonnae [laughing]. //THAT] was this neighbour that told me that she's got all the gossip. So ah don't know [laughing]. ... Well she thinks this one she's not a gossip but, she tells me things that this one says, the other day. She goes usually SWIMMING she's awful PROUD of herself, she goes swimming and, exercise classes and, the other day she told this one, Monday swimming but there's no swimming today she was "goin away doon the TOWN" [emphasising a Scottish accent to imitate her neighbour], she couldnae "sit beside that man all day" [laughing].

These extracts are used to illustrate Miss D's frustrations with her situation. She reluctantly accepts her neighbours' company because they tend her garden but she misses her day trips to the sea. Miss D has always enjoyed spending time on her own and now she is housebound and caught up in the neighbourhood culture which she has managed to avoid for over eighty years. Miss D is finding it difficult to adjust to her new situation and compares her life to how it used to be and how she used to spend her time. She thinks longingly about her day trips and two holidays a years. She compares her old life to the dullness of her life now which is cluttered with unwanted visits from neighbours gossiping about each other. Neighbours is a theme which shows how Miss D's opportunities for intimacy and spending time on her own are now restricted by her living arrangements. It also illustrates Miss D's lack of adjustment because she is frustrated by her situation.

But yet ah like on ma own

In this study, most of the members of the day centres were living alone, even the fit elderly who came for the taught classes. Stereotypical images of ageing portray older women who live alone as lonely and miserable (Jerrome, 1993a). In contrast, we do not expect young adults who live alone to be lonely or depressed and even when physically disabled persons are living alone we do not expect them to be lonely and depressed. Living with others might be a solution but it is not always acceptable for the older person or those they could live with. Also, Mrs E, Mrs K and Mrs N show that living with others does not always provide meaningful sources of intimacy.

Living within an extended family has its problems (Holzer et al., 1985) and the incidence of depression among older women has been associated with living with siblings (Walton et al., 1990). Moving in with family members requires sensitive negotiation of social roles and if negotiations are unsuccessful or this work is ignored someone in the new family unit loses out. The disadvantages of institutional living, or residential living which is now more common, have been well documented and might not be a preferred alternative to living alone (Bond, 1993). Evers (1981) found that institutional care was particularly problematic for older women because they found it difficult relinquishing their domestic role in a setting where others carried out caring and household tasks which they once provided.

The next extracts are used to illustrate issues which are of concern to those who live alone. In this study, it was not lone living itself which was significant for the women but the meaning of the situation for them. Most women enjoyed a balance of socialising and time on their own. They looked forward to coming to the day centre but also enjoyed time on their own. Some of the women who told me they were feeling lonely and isolated could not understand why they felt lonely because they usually found time on their own fulfilling and enjoyable. Since the years they had been widowed these women had developed successful ways of managing their lives. Mrs K talked about enjoying reading in bed after her husband died because he did not let her do that. They were used to satisfactorily filling in their time on their own by reading, watching television, listening to music, and so on. Some of the women who took part in the in-depth interviews had recently lost interest in the things used to enjoy when they were on their own. The extract below provides an example of Mrs A trying to make sense of her feelings of loneliness because she considers herself to be a *loner* type :

Mrs A: Though she [sister] says that's she's no gonnae bad that, she says, "Ah'll." But she never spends TIME, ken? So in an hello an a breeze oot again [small laugh]. An ma daughter-in-laws as well they never dinnae, one disnae visit me, one has tae dae ma business she comes, and spends half an hour an a cup o coffee then she's away.

VT: Mmmhuh.

Mrs A: Ken? Well ah says folk hasn't folk hasnae time. And eh, an ah'm no ah'm no one ah'm mebbe a bit o a loner.

VT: Right. You are?

Mrs A: Yes. Ah'm a bit o a loner.

VT: Mmmhuh.

Mrs A: Ah like ah like ma own company. See same wi, mean ah speak away a lot to Maria and Yvonne [two members at the day centre] and everything they two. But ah dunnae like goin in the other crowd. Another table. Ah had to go across one week because, there were naebdy but masel there so ah had to go across. But eh, no ah'm, same as at the other lunch club ah wis ah, ah didnae ah wisnae in the clique, you know what ah mean?

VT: Uhuh.

Mrs A: Ah wisnae in the company style. Ah wis sittin outside it sometimes somebody would come an sit beside me an sometimes they didnae. So ah'm quite happy on ma own, to be truthful.

Mrs A cannot understand why she gets annoyed with her sister for not spending time with her with because she has always liked her own company and previously she did not mind being on her own. Being reliant on someone else's company is something new for Mrs A and she tries to understand why she has become like this. Mrs A cannot make sense of her feelings and is annoyed with herself for being uncharacteristically dependent on someone else.

Women who were lifelong isolates, like Miss D, now missed spending time on their own doing their favourite activities. Physical frailty prevents Miss D going out and about as she used to and she has to endure the company of unwanted visitors. Miss D started going to the day centre because her doctor stopped her homehelp one day a week to make sure Miss D attended the day centre. Miss D was annoyed about this because she would rather stay at home on her own. She does not have much in common with many of the women at the day centre but she is forced to mix with them once a week. Similarly to Miss B, she senses her lack of place at the day centre, within a group of working class women who's life centres around their extended family :

VT: So that's ma first question is em: Could YOU tell me why YOU first started coming to the day centre?

Miss D: Oh it was the doctor from ah think it was the hospital came ah don't know [...] [laugh] said that she'd like to see me going to a, a lunch centre twice a week.

VT: Uhuh.

Miss D: And, she would arrange but ah wouldn't go twice because of ma homehelps as it was ah had to, change ma homehelp to go on Wednesday. But, to me of course the thing is NOT to have to cook a meal it's THAT, standing about and cooking goes for ma back. And it's the idea of gettin a meal made.

VT: Right.

Miss D: Really, s'all that's in it.

VT: That's all that's in it for you?

Miss D: YES.

VT: What about the company?

Miss D: Tut, oh well some of it's all right but, they're all keen on BINGO and things that ah'm not interested in [laughing]. And Vi she's, she's friendly but you know she's a bit mixed she'll be sayin, "How often do you come?" And over again and then she'll be saying as often, "It gets you out the house it gets you out the house" [laughing].

Each week at the day centre, Vi sits beside Miss D and Miss D chats to her but they do not have much to talk about. Miss D has had a very different life from the majority of the women at the day centre because she helped her family run a local shop and went on holiday twice a year. She does not feel lonely and isolated but lacks intimacy in her life because she is no longer able to go out and do her favourite things. She has to rely on her friends picking her up to go out on a day trip and she has to fit in with their plans. She is annoyed that she has had to join the day centre to make sure she receives a cooked meal twice a week. This woman likes time on her own and despite living alone she has few opportunities to be on her own.

The theme of *but ah like on my own* explains two types of behaviour. The women pose the question to themselves, "I like being on my own so why don't I like it?" to try to understand why they feel lonely and isolated. For example, Mrs A cannot understand why she gets annoyed with her sister for not visiting because she usually likes her own company. The women also say to themselves, "I like being on my own!" as a way of trying to tell others to go away and leave them alone. Women who have always enjoyed their own company are forced to join in group activities at the day centres because of their increasing dependence. Rice (1995) suggests that as older people lose their independence they become dependent on others for sources of

intimacy. She does not predict that as dependency increases on others opportunities for intimacy decrease.

Is being single significant?

Jerome (1993a) explains that those women who have always lived alone establish successful strategies for maintaining social contacts and become used to the independence of living alone. These women do not experience the sudden change which other groups of women experience when, in old age, they live alone for the first time. She explains that widows are at a greater risk of loneliness because when their partner dies they might lose their main source of social contact and intimacy. In this study, a woman from the art class described the huge gap in her life when her husband died. She had to build a new social network because her husband had been her best friend as well as her partner. Those who have lived with siblings before their siblings died might experience similar losses to widows if their siblings were their main source of social contact and intimacy.

Miss B is missing her sister who she lived with, along with another sister who died a few years previous. Her brother died recently and Miss B feels very alone because she has no family left except her sister-in-law whom she dislikes. Miss B's best friend also died in the same year as her sister and brother. Miss B's social life focused round her sisters and one close friend. When these significant people died Miss B was very alone. Being single was not advantageous for helping Miss B adjust to the aloneness of old age because her life had been family focused, if in a different way to married women. In addition, this aloneness has occurred very late in life for Miss B because she was 86 when these bereavements occurred. Married women tend to lose their husbands earlier than this because men's life expectancy is shorter than women's are. It must have been a great shock for Miss B to adjust to these bereavements. Miss B is one of the women who found making friends at the day centre difficult. She was different from the other women because she had a career and not had a lifelong partner.

The women in the study who were single discussed the impact of being single on their lives. Miss F was never married and talked about the advantages and disadvantages of being single. She likes being single because she has friends who give her support out of love and not out of familial obligation. She talked about her sister's expectations of

Miss F to care for their mother because she does not have her own family to care for. Miss F was one of the young-old women who took part in the study and helped her mother who was over 90 years. Miss F discussed what she perceived as the disadvantages of being married. She suggested that married women of all ages have no time to find out who they are because they are overwhelmed by their family's needs. The two extracts below illustrate these comparisons :

Miss F discussed the advantages and disadvantages of being a single person who is counted for as herself against being seen only as a member of a family. She is relieved that when she needs help that it is given out of love and not obligation, because she does not have a family to fulfil the caring role she may need or does need. ... She said that her youngest sister has a young family, and doesn't have energy to care for their mother and Miss F as well as her own family.

And later during the interview

Miss F says that when you have a family you have no time to think of yourself because you are always thinking about their needs first. If you have a family you don't have time to make your own life manageable, but it is important to give yourself time and make your life manageable. But she said they [older women] don't have time to do that because they are too busy being a mother and grandmother to give any time for themselves. I told her that I wanted to give older women time to talk about their lives. She said old women can't come and say who they are, because they are bogged down by their families. She said young mothers aren't letting this happen to them. She wonders what they will be like when they are old. She said that they will have a bit more of themselves.

Rice (1995) suggests that older women who have been single create support systems outside the family and lead a more fulfilled life because they do not rely on family for social contacts. The example she provides is single women meeting people when travelling. She presents an ideal image of the single older woman who has had a flamboyant and carefree life merely because she is single. Three participants in this study, Miss D, Miss H and Miss J, challenge this idealistic image of older single women. These participants remained single because they stayed at home to care for their elderly parents, and one also cared for her elderly aunts when her parents died. These women's lifestyles did not mirror the image of a well travelled woman with tales to tell. Miss D has travelled a lot but she mentioned coach trips with a friend and not the glamorous adventures which Rice (1995) predicts for single older women. These single women were shy and had probably led a quiet lifestyle. For them, being

single had probably inhibited their sociability. For example, Miss J was finding it difficult to make friends at the sheltered housing where she had recently moved.

Jerrome (1993a) suggests that women who have not been involved in a longterm partnership might benefit in later life from a lifetime of coping socially and emotionally. When circumstances significantly restrict opportunities and resources for intimacy, for example, physical frailty, the loss of close friends and family, and moving house, it becomes difficult to adjust to these changes even when drawing on a lifetime of coping. Previously successful coping strategies might not be sufficient to overcome difficulties experienced in later life because life circumstances are also changing. In this study, single women had similar difficulties as married women had in establishing intimacy in their lives. For example, those single women who stayed at home to care for elderly members of the family appeared shy and lacked confidence to make new friends. Jerrome (1993a) challenges the negative stereotype about old spinster women and recognises the positive affects of being single, as Miss F does in this study. However, the analysis reveals that when women are struggling with life it does not matter whether they were single or married because intimacy resources are uncertain within both groups.

Expressing sexuality

In this study, expressing sexuality was a significant theme in the data and the women talked about it as part of their everyday lives. Married women talked about how their marriage and in relationships before they were married affected their outlook on life. Widowed women discussed different aspects of their marriage, for example, how their husbands had restricted their lives, or how desperately they missed the intimacy they had with their husbands. Single women talked about the meaning they made from not having had a longterm relationship. The latter group discussed the opportunities which being single brought but also wondered what they might have missed out on in not having had an intimate relationship within a marriage.

The topic of romance generated much chatter. The women wanted to hear about the staff's relationships, they joked about avoiding unwanted affections from male day centre members, and compared young women's experiences of sexuality today with their *green* naiveté when they married. They questioned their attractiveness and compared themselves to sisters and friends who had more suitors than they had. Some

women talked about how they were constructing their image as they aged. For example, Miss H no longer dyed her hair blonde, toned down her make-up, and carefully chose clothes which challenged stereotypical images of old age but at the same time suited her age. Miss H found satisfaction in adjusting her self image as she aged.

These findings contradict Scrutton (1989) who suggests that older people need encouraged to explore their sexuality because of an unwillingness to talk about what they regard as a difficult subject to discuss. Analysis of the data in this study challenge this view because the women talked with ease about different aspects of their sexuality with each other and the staff at the day centres. Another example of a misconception about older people's lack of openness to discuss to their sexuality was found in O'Connor's (1992) review of women's friendships. She explains that women's conversations reflect their position in society and suggests that therefore old and young women's conversations are different. She suggests different topics of conversation are typical for different ages of women and these topics reflect the social position of different age groups of women. She suggests that older women do not talk about their sexuality as younger women do, and rather the focus of their talk is on their ailments :

one might speculate that some of the most crucial issues discussed in friendships between elderly women are likely to be related to dependency (e.g. whether or not an elderly woman should ask her daughter to help her with shopping and so risk being seen as a burden). Amongst married women, issues related to sexual fidelity and maternal responsibility are likely to be particularly important (e.g. discourses related to whether a man is "leading a man" on or "asking for trouble", or whether an employed mother's children are suffering because of the number of paid hours work she is does). Amongst young single women one might speculate that much of the conversation is likely to revolve around interpretation of signals from boyfriends or authority figures ("Is he really interested in me? - or could he just have been bored or wanting to make his old girlfriend jealous?", etc.).

(O'Connor, 1992; pp. 189-90)

O'Connor (1992) expects older women's talk to be different from younger women's talk because older women are no longer interested in their sexuality and become focused on their changing bodies. Old age is not inevitably a time of physical frailty as O'Connor (1992) suggests, and in addition, analysis of the data presented here reveals

that the women at the day centres discouraged talk about ailing bodies. During this study, it was found that the women enjoyed the buzz of romance and discussed it in the same giddy way that younger women do. The women laughed a lot about their sexuality and discussed with one another whether they missed sexual relationships or were *done with that*. They discussed the disadvantages of having to manage another man if they had another relationship and were glad that part of their lives was over. Below is an extract from a conversation with Mrs A and her friends at the day centre when she is being teased about a gentleman who shows a romantic interest in her. The extract is particularly interesting because Mrs A is one of the women who was experiencing a number of difficulties but it can be seen here that she still enjoys this aspect of her life :

Yvonne tells Mrs A that one of the members from another lunch club has been asking for her. Yvonne “lied” to the gentleman and said Mrs A had not been well and that was why she had not been at the lunch club. When Mrs A heard this, and she put her cushion up to her face [because she was excitedly blushing or because she is shy about these things - perhaps a small romance].

May, p. 31

A sexual relationship is not an ideal for everyone but analysis of the data in this study reveals that sexuality and sexual relationships are an integral aspect of the women’s identity. In this study, sexuality was included in casual conversations and the participants purposively discussed perceptions of their sexuality during the interviews to reveal a particular meaning of themselves. Single women were aware that other people might consider them unfortunate and they contemplated over what impact not having had a longterm intimate relationship had on their lives. For example, Miss H, wonders about meeting someone in the future, regrets not having met somebody to share her life with, but also considers that having a partner might restrict her independent nature :

Miss H: But ah think ma life is busy enough. The em woman from CRUSE [bereavement counselling] when ma mother died she said, ... “There’s two types,” she said. “There is the Miss Haversham type, and there’s YOUR type. Who pull their house apart and modernise, and fly round all the time.” ... Well Miss Haversham, she didn’t have a bereavement but she was em she was em jilted, Charles Dickens’ “Great Expectations”.

VT: Oh right.

Miss H: And she sat ah think for twenty years in her wedding [...] night. ... Ah DON'T think you get that sort of thing so much nowadays, single women have better quality of life, in fact ah think it's swinging. That young women are NOT wantin marriage so much.

VT: That's right.

Miss H: Yes. So AH feel, there there's lots of improvements in ma quality of LIFE. There were times when ah was very unhappy. Didn't like ma job, and was too tired for a social life. ... My friend and ah go to the club every three weeks, but ah don't know whether that's because ah'm very tall or the expression on my face. Ah don't think ah'm ugly so ah don't think it's that, ah don't get dances.

VT: //Mmm]

Miss H: //And] that's a wee bit depressing. That's one of the sadnesses about my LIFE is that, ah was in a job ah didn't like and was being a wall flower at the dancing. Although, ah did have a few boyfriends. Ah was engaged to a chap, ... [b]ut my friend doesn't think he was good enough for me. Em ah was actually unhappy, THEN. ... Yes, but ah don't think ah'm very compatible. Ah think people are compatible with me. Ah think that's what people misunderstood, that FELLOWS are very compatible with me, but not me with them. Ah don't know WHY really, ah'm in that STATE, on the one hand, ah'll go into a cafe and eat a meal because ah'm lonely, spend too much money but on the other hand. Ah couldn't stand somebody saying, "Oh don't take that handbag," or, "those shoes are horrible." What some of them DO ah don't think that ah could, ah think ah've been a woman in ma own right too long, and ah would actually not cope with that, so ah think it is too late for me, but you never know [smiling].

The extract above illustrates Miss H comparing the positive affects of a relationship with the loss of independence associated with being in a relationship. The literature suggests that there are great benefits from being in a sexual relationship. Greengross & Greengross (1989) explain that a lack of physical and emotional touch can cause people to shrink into themselves. Enjoying sex with someone can enhance confidence and touching and caressing leads to sharing joys and fears. Without an intimate relationship it is difficult to be feel comfortable enough to share these joys and fears. Scrutton (1989) suggests that physical contact is necessary to provide nurturance for older people, as it is for infants and children. These writers extol the benefits of sex for older people because they are attempting to challenge stereotypical images of old

age as a non-sexual time. They suggest sexual relationships as one route to fulfilment in later life.

Other writers suggest that the importance of sexuality should not be exaggerated in old age (Jerrome, 1993b; Rice, 1995). Certain circumstances might affect an older woman's desire for closeness and intimacy. For example, physical pain or bereavement might inhibit a woman's previous lust for life which includes her desire for intimacy (Rice, 1995). It is important to challenge stereotypical images about ageing and sexuality but it is also important not to idealise the affects of a partnership on well-being. Idealised images heralding the benefits of sexual relationships could perpetuate negative stereotypes about single women who have chosen to be single all their lives. At the day centres, perceptions about the women who had not had a lifelong partner were described in prejudiced ways.

Two women from the day centre were described as *aggressive* because they were a *miss*. Miss B lost several of her belongings at the day centre and she suspected they were stolen and asked for compensation. Although a frail older woman, Miss B remains articulate and assertive. Miss B's behaviour was difficult for the staff to deal with and she was described as *confrontational* and being typical of a miss. Another woman, Edith, was described as aggressive, again because her behaviour is assertive. This woman has cared for her sister for a long time and the staff explain her aggressive behaviour has developed over the years while she has had to contend with various professionals on behalf of her sister. The extracts below illustrate these two examples :

Jo was not sure of Miss B's name. when I told her it was Miss ..., she said, "I might I've guessed!" [This woman's coat had gone missing at the day centre and she was worrying the staff to find or replace it] Then I said, "Hey wait a minute, I'm a miss." Then she said, "Well you're young." [As it turns out Miss B has in been married, but is divorced].

July, p. 19

Another example :

I was asking if Edith had dementia today, because she seemed fairly aggressive in an uncertain kind of way. Members of staff discussed her. They didn't think she was depressed, but thought her aggressive behaviour was part of her personality, and she had recognised all the staff after being away from the day centre for a year, after her sister's death. Apparently her sister was very frail, and this woman has looked out for sister all her life, and as a result has always used a "determined" [again this is my terminology, they actually used "aggressive"] attitude with other people. Jo said the reason Edith was

aggressive is because she was a typical "Miss". I said, "Hey I'm a Miss." She said, yes but you won't be a "Miss" forever. And I said I might be, and could imagine people blaming particular behaviours of mine on my "Missness".

September, p. 10

In the data, there are examples of prejudiced views about being single. Those who have not enjoyed a longterm relationship are expected to be bitter in their old age. Rice (1995) is also concerned about older women feeling pressured into being sexual when they are not interested in it. Some single women are falsely assumed to be non-sexual. Rice (1995) is worried that this sexual liberation for older people will force them to discuss their sexuality even when it is not a significant aspect of their lives.

When chatting about their sexuality the women at day centres were sensitive to one another's limits. Some were more risqué than others were but those who did not join in were not forced to or considered prudish if they did not. Earlier it was shown that members made suggestions to those who needed *cheering up* but on the topic of sexuality none of the women tried to make suggestions about how to liven up someone's sexuality. The topic of sexuality was a lot of fun for the women and *advice* was offered to one another as a joke. Rice (1995) explains that what is important is that older women are given the chance to express their feelings about life without any preconceived notions of what those feelings should be and without presuming to encourage all older women to express their sexuality. Jerrome (1993b) warns that exaggerating the importance of sexuality in later life might create another area of deprivation in the lives of older people. At the same, sexuality is an important aspect of older women's lives which should not be ignored (Greengross, 1986; Jerrome, 1993a).

What is interesting about expressing sexuality in this study is the ease with which it is included in conversations. For example, I did not ask Mrs G about her past relationships or what she thought of today's morals but she offered these stories as examples of her life when I asked her to tell me about herself. Expressions of sexuality are aspects of the self the women wanted to tell me about. The women wanted to tell me how they perceived their sexuality. The women's emphasis on their sexuality had not been anticipated at the start of the research. The *expressing sexuality* theme was not discovered until the data were being scrutinised to elaborate existing theoretical links. During later stages of the analysis it was discovered that sexuality is a significant part of the women's life but data collection had not purposefully focused

on sexuality. Below Mrs G tells me about her regret that she is missing out on the current sexual liberation :

Mrs G: Ah was lookin at a young girl on the telly this morning ah don't know if you saw it? Thirteen year old and she's been banned from school because ER skirt's too short. Thirteen year old! And er mother is up against up THE rules of the school, now you must have rules. But personally ah didn't think it was too short for a thirteen year old it was just above er knee.

VT: Uhuh.

Mrs G: Ah didn't think it was too short ah in fact, ah think YOU YOUNG ones that are up HERE [pointing to the top of her thigh] ah think you're a disgrace to womanhood! [laughing]. And no ah think that's ah really that's too short. Because eh, let's face it this is a sexy world in which we live, ah'm only sorry ah'm that age and that and sex doesn't interest me [laughing]. No but ah do think that eh it's eh encouraging men, to be SEXUALLY ACTIVE.

VT: Uhuh.

Mrs G: So that eh as ah say ah wish ah was in ma thirties again [laughing].

VT: Take advantage of it [laughing].

Mrs G: Ah might, ah might [laughing]. ... Ah'll tell you want to hear about my romances? [laughing]. Ah'm always gonna write a book you know?

VT: Uhuh.

Mrs G: ... But eh we had some lovely times down there [dance hall],
...

Expressing sexuality was a positive theme in this study because the women appeared to be experiencing adjustment with this aspect of their lives, even when other aspects of their lives were distressing. For example, Miss H discussed her past and future opportunities for romance. She was optimistic but recognised certain limitations which reflected a successful adjustment in later life. The women in this study made sense of their sexuality by reflecting on how they expressed their sexuality within different relationships over the years and purposefully shaped a particular image of themselves with clothes and make-up. The outcome of these reflections appeared to be

positive in the main and the women were successfully adjusting in this aspect of their lives.

Managing Change in Later Life

During the later years of life many changes occur and the data in this chapter are used to illustrate the different ways women manage these changes. Carrying out data collection at day centres for older people provided the scope with which to compare of the lives of different women in similar circumstances. During the data analysis contrasting experiences of ageing were discovered. The activities which the members of the day centres took part in reflected their social and physical circumstances. Meeting women from the day care service, taught classes, and the lunch club provided an opportunity to compare and contrast the ways older women in different social circumstances manage change in later life. Some women find the changes overwhelming and old age is not a positive period in their lives when others manage to adjust positively to the changes. Some women who found old age an overwhelming period in their lives were asked to take part in an in-depth interview and their difficulties were explored further.

The category of managing change is used to explore how women manage the changes associated with old age, for example physical frailty and bereavement. Physical disability had a particular meaning for the women from the day centres because it is associated with stereotypical images of old age. Women tried to understand their experiences of ageing and used reminiscence as a way to think about how would be expected to manage their old lives. When faced by many changes in different aspects of life maintaining hope is difficult and some women discussed how they managed this and others described their lost hope. The discussion in this chapter begins with an illustration of how those who experienced physical frailty managed it.

Being disabled late in life is a sign of old age

The analysis revealed that the women who took part in this study described themselves as old when their experiences of late life matched the experiences' of the old-old group of frail elderly people. The women labelled themselves as old when they experienced physical frailty because images of old age are associated with being a burden and experiencing illnesses. Up until then, or if they do not become frail, women do not think of themselves as *old*. These are findings which also emerged from Thompson et al.'s (1990) study (see Chapter One). In this study, Olive talked about changes in her self-perceptions following a stroke which left her with a significant physical disability

and feeling old. After the stroke she became dependent on her husband and started coming to a day centre for the first time in her old age. Coming to the day centre was a difficult decision for Olive to make. Olive thought day centres were for *old people* and before the stroke she did not describe herself as old. One day at the day centre Olive explained that because of the disability the stroke left her with she now thinks of herself as *old* :

Olive tells me how she felt “old” after her stroke and when she started coming to the day centre. ... [The disability caused by a stroke, for example, could be caused by an accident or illness any time in life. Why does disability at a later stage in life suddenly signal decline and dependence “typical” of old age? ... It is not the disability which causes the person to feel old, but the “age” at which the disability has occurred. This disability in a younger person would not be as significant in its association to age.] ... Olive said that before her stroke she didn’t feel any different than she had done for years before. [The stroke changed her perception of herself, into an “old woman”. ... [D]isability related to age, is definitely a sign that the body is giving up. That’s what it is, a sign that the body is no longer willing or able to do the things your mind wants it to do.]

May, p. 46

Analysis of the extract above reveals that after having a stroke Olive perceived herself as elderly because the stroke negatively effected her physical abilities. Until Olive’s experiences matched those of the *old-old* she did not think of herself as being old. For her, old age began when her experiences were similar to the old-old. Physical decline signalled the beginning of old age for Olive. Social structures such as retiring at a particular chronological age do not determine when old age begins. Unlike some of the other women, Olive would not tell anyone her age, and therefore for Olive experiencing a stroke was a more significant marker for the beginning of old age than chronological age is.

When the women talked about *old age* they associated it with health problems. Often when the women at the day centre complained about their health problems in front of me they would say, “See what you’ve coming to you?” There is an assumption that *old age doesnae come itself*. When old age starts there is an assumption that there will be concomitant health problems. One woman, Mrs L, often talked about the association between old age and poor health. Mrs L had various health problems and discussed them openly. Below are extracts from conversations Mrs L had at the day centre :

[w]hen Mrs L talks about her incontinence and Mrs C joins in. Mrs C joins in the joke when they discuss toilet habits with each other. Later on Margaret says to me, "Look what you've coming to you?"

June, p. 4

And another example

Mrs A and Mrs L and Bertha discussed Mrs L's sore back. They were all laughing and their closing comment was, "See what old age brings?"

June, p. 18

Negative images of old age were prevalent among the frail older women at the day centre. They expect health problems to occur in later life and presume physical decline is an inevitable part of ageing. These perceptions about old age are held despite encountering positive images among other members of the day centre. The elderly volunteers and those women who attend the taught classes are physically fit and socially active older people and challenge negative images of ageing. However, the experiences of these *young-old* women start to be beyond the imagination of the women who use the day care facilities. The experiences of the women who use the day care service at the day centre match stereotypical images of old age and the *old-old*. The women at the day centre associate physical decline with old age but analyses of demographic data reveal that physical decline does not increase until after 75 years (Sidell, 1995). The women who use the day care facility are frail elderly women living alone and in the main over 75 years. It was physical decline which signified the beginning of old age for these women and not their chronological age. The women do not use their age as a marker of old age and when other members show signs of having greater health problems than they do they are described as old. An example is presented below :

[h]ad a bit of a chat with Florence again. Pearl comes in to day centre and Florence talks about Pearl being the "old woman". She says, "I like to be nice to the old woman". [Pearl is probably younger than Florence but because she is more disabled she is called the "old woman".] Florence goes on to discuss how some of her neighbours in the sheltered housing have lost their minds, and she is just grateful that hasn't happened to her.

June, p. 18

Women who do not experience health problems in their later years are described as *good for their age* and admired for not becoming like the stereotypical images of old age. The women recognise that those who are very elderly, in terms of biological years, are more likely to experience health problems than younger older people. The women who manage to maintain some independence in late life, despite their age, are complimented for their agility. Biggs (1993) suggests older people interpret their well-being as a sign that they are exceptions to the common sense of normal ageing. In this study, one woman who was 94 years and still able to come to the day centre is complimented for continued enjoyment of life :

Agnes tells us she is going on holiday for two weeks. She is going to a residential home while her daughter is away in Benidorm. Iris and Jessie discuss how good Agnes is for her 94 years. Agnes says that the carers [at the residential home] ask her when she's coming to live with them. She says she won't because of the clubs she goes to. Jean tells her she is lucky that she can still get out and about and enjoy the clubs and should enjoy them while she can. Agnes says that she can only just bare two weeks away from all her clubs. She wouldn't consider going to stay anywhere to be looked after because she enjoys her clubs too much. Jean tells Agnes she should enjoy going out while she can because she is not able.

September, p. 50

The women are surprised and impressed by anyone who experiences good health in their 90s because it is not expected and contradicts the stereotypical images of old age. Sidell (1995) suggests that women have internalised negative stereotype images of ageing and consequently the women in this study perceive those with few health problems as exceptions to be admired. Most of the day care members had varying health problem and they were mostly *frail elderly* women. They are likely to perceive those in their 90s who are still able to walk about independently as unusual. Women who are volunteers at the day centres and women who go to the taught classes at the day centre are the fit and healthy elderly and sometimes chronologically older than the day care members. The day care members might not describe them as old, in spite of what their age might be, because they are active and do not experience the health problems the day care members experience. The day care members do not perceive the fit and healthy older women as positive role models because they think of them as an exception, like the woman who is 94 years and still comes to the day centre for day care.

The women at the day centres presume that ill-health is an inevitable part of old age despite findings that it is the minority of older people who experience frailty and dependence. However, Slater (1995) is cautious about promoting these positive images of ageing because a doom and gloom image of ageing has been replaced by an all-singing-all-dancing older person. Other older people are perceived as victims when they do not achieve this all-singing-all-dancing image. Work such as Rowe & Kahn's (1987; 1997) has been challenged because it promotes the misconception that old age can be overcome by adhering to a particular regime which inhibits the effects of ageing. They describe models of successful ageing as achievable because old age could *come itself* without the health problems which the women in this study expect to happen to them. Rowe & Kahn's (1987) work illustrates that particular factors can be ameliorated to promote well-being in old age. Slater (1995) explains that we must be cautious not to make women like the day members in this study think they are victims of old age.

I'm not at that stage yet

The women were determined to show me that they were not *old* by asserting their physical independence in front of me. For example, when I offered assistance to help the women go into the dining room for lunch it was usually refused. In the fieldnotes, it was noted that although the women refused help from me they sometimes accepted it from one another and the staff at the day centre. The women might have refused help from me because they wanted to show me as a visitor that despite their age they continue to be independent. The women did not want to show me any of their frailties and insisted on struggling on their own :

Florence described a trip out she had to the Borders with the Round Table because the woman sitting beside her in the day centre was also on the trip. Note - her legs and her speed. Refusing my arm, because she hasn't got to that stage yet.

June, p. 23

And later

Bunty refused to take my arm to the dining room, because she wasn't, "At that stage yet!" Many of the ladies refuse to "*take an arm*" through to the dining room because they hope they, "Aren't at that stage yet!" ...

June, p. 50

Those who refused my assistance were women I had established relationships with as well as those who I did not get to know as well. In the main, it was women who were frail that I offered assistance to. Among the women there is a strong need to assert their independence. Those women who were frail needed to demonstrate that they were independent in some aspects of their lives. Being helped with physical tasks is a reminder that your body is no longer functioning as it once did. The women were conscious of not being seen as helpless and ensured that other members were not given help which was not needed. Members were criticised for trying to help others who were frailer than them. In the example below, Anne shouts across the day centre to tell one member to stop helping another :

Bunty was looking very well today. Smiling as usual. Her hair was not as smart though. And she didn't seem to have enough clothes on. She said she was warm enough. Mrs N helped Bunty on with her jacket today because she seemed to be struggling, but Anne shouted over, "Hey, Bunty can put her own jacket on".

May, p. 4

Women who continued an active life into their 80s talked about the impact of their changing body on their self-perception and others' perceptions of them. The following example illustrates the importance of body image to older women. When I introduced my study to one of the taught classes a discussion developed about what it means to be old. One member of the class told me she was in her late 80s and talked about her changing body and the impact of this on the way others perceive her. This woman is aware that others see her elderly body before they see who she is and they consequently treat her in a way which reflects their attitudes to older people. She thinks that because she does not wear clothes which older people are expected to wear others do not treat her as they treat older women who conform to traditional images of ageing :

[o]ldest woman in the class (in her late 80s) said that your body may change but your personality is the same. People treat you like a child just because you are old. [she wore very "groovy" clothes, a baseball cap and light trousers.] And she spoke about people expecting you to wear "boring" clothes when you get older, but if you do people talk down to you.

June, p. 48

This woman understands that her attitude and choice of clothes are not what is expected from an older woman. Others who meet the criteria of how an older person should look and behave are treated less considerately than she is. This woman has found that her body image affects people's attitudes towards her. Other older people who fit the stereotypical images are patronised because the attitudes and behaviours of others are mediated through their perceptions and meanings about body image. Women who wear clothes *typical* for their age and act passively are perceived by others as confirming stereotypical images about old age.

The woman from the class tries to challenge expectations about the way older women age. She does not try to hide the ageing process through energetic exercising, like people in their 90s who run marathons (Sidell, 1995), or clothing which ignores a changing body shape. This woman has adjusted to her changing body and maintained her vibrancy and style within the current limits of her physical abilities. The woman from the class does not say, "I'm not at that stage yet," because she accepts that her body is changing. She has found ways to express herself which do not undermine her positive self image. When assistance is offered to those women who use the day care service, for walking to the dining room it is a reminder that their bodies no longer function effectively. This reminder is a sign that they are old and the negative images of ageing ensure that nobody wants to be perceived as old. These women have not managed to establish positive ways of expressing their age and continue to try to deny the effects of ageing.

Not being able to do what you used to be able to do

The women talked about the impact of no longer being able to do what they used to do and why the changes associated with ageing became problematic. The women told me that recovery from an illness is more difficult in later years than in younger years. They explained that an illness is also likely to leave residual effects in later life. Old age is a time when many changes occur and the negative effects of a previous illness impede a woman's ability to manage these changes. The following two extracts are used to show how the women notice the impact of previous illnesses on their lives :

VT: What I'm asking is what STRATEGIES do you use to you know stop yourself being panicky?

Mrs E: ... Course they sent me back to the day hospital doctor sent me up there. But eh, but eh. Oh no it doesn't it's no like that NOW [severe panic attacks]. No. ...

VT: Uhuh.

Mrs E: It takes it's just the wear and tear, you know what ah mean? After when ah fell and aw that you know it's aw. Must you cannae just feel that, quite the same. You know? Especially when you're OLDER.

VT: Yeah.

Mrs E: When you're younger yes you've, other distractions and that but when your older it's, just takes it's toll you know? But still.

Another example

Mrs A: Well ah'm 84. ... Aye it's a job, when you get old. "It's not very kind." This is what ah always //say.] ... "Old age is not very kind." But ah always say that, if you've had something happen to ye, and ah say, you go DOWN! [clapping hands together vertically]. And when you're up you're up there.

VT: Mmmhuh.

Mrs A: But tae get yourself back, you dunnae get up, there you cannae get up there [demonstrating with hands at different heights in the air].

VT: Why don't you think you get quite back to your previous form?

Mrs A: No you never go back to your previous form. NEVER.

VT: Why do you //think you don't?]

Mrs A: //You always] lose something.

VT: Right.

Mrs A: You always, you never go back to your, as you were, you.

VT: You mean that INSIDE you lose something?

Mrs A: Bodily. ...

VT: And d'you think that kinda drains your kinda of inner strength as well?

Mrs A: Yes.

VT: And you don't have maybe the same FIGHTIN spirit, or?

Mrs A: Phhh, ah dunnae hae much o a fightin spirit hen?

The two examples of data show how the residual effects of an anxiety disorder and a fall cause the women to be drained and left without a *fighting spirit* to manage changes in later life. When Mrs K was interviewed she mentioned alcohol a few times. She

described how she used to enjoy drinking on special occasions. She no longer drinks alcohol because of a heart condition and being diagnosed with diabetes. Mrs K used to enjoy alcohol and used it to relax and join-in at social events. The following extract is used to show how Mrs K misses being able to enjoy alcohol. She tried wine at her grandson's wedding but found it did not have the usual pleasant affects on her. Mrs K is currently facing many changes in her life, for example a recent move into sheltered housing because living with her daughter did not work out. Mrs K's social world has changed significantly and not being able to join in social occasions the way she used to is difficult to come to terms with. She can no longer relax and have fun the way she used to and her established ways of managing no longer exist :

Mrs K: Oh, we had a smashing night up there [sheltered housing communal room]. ... Oh great. A three course meal tae start off. And a glass orange JUICE [sounding disgruntled].

VT: So do you, you don't drink at all anymore?

Mrs K: Not allowed it. WELL ah'm no saying ah'm no ALLOWED it, ah'm allowed at least two, but ah don't. Ah spoke to nurse last year, coming up for Christmas. And ah says, well no so much as the New Year, ah says, "Is there anything AH can get tae drink?" Ah'd rather than keep saying to everybody, "No, no, no." She says, "Yes you can have a glass o white wine." So that's aw ah drink now. And that's only once or twice mebbe a year. Well it was twice this year. Cos ah had ma grandson's wedding. Now ah'm lookin for ma glass this year [laughing].

VT: For Christmas? [laughing].

Mrs K: Ah've got a bottle of well it's no a bottle a half bottle o vodka in that cupboard is nearly six year old.

VT: Do you just keep it there as a memento? [laughing].

Mrs K: No well actually it was it wis a full half bottle when AH brought it here. And then ah had ma daughter over fae Canada, and the night before she was going away. Ah was going intae the hospital, tae get ma eye done. And she was gonna be away before ah come OUT. ... That's how there's only half o a bottle now. And it's never ah've never been touched since. So at least it'll be maturing [laughing].

The next two extracts are used to show that when the women can no longer do what they used to be able to it is difficult for them to adjust to limitations on their activities. Mrs C explains that it *hurts* that she can no longer do her housework as she used to.

Seeing others continue to be independent and having to lower lifelong standards of housework make it difficult to manage the changes of old age. It is difficult to accept a body that no longer does what it used to. Mrs E explains that it is difficult when others her own age continue to *march along* without signs of disability :

Mrs E: Well there's Beryl ah've known her since ah came up here that was forty, nearly my son was only four months. And you should see her walking about quite ... you see? So you could be lucky and everything, not too. Ah see er quite ah don't see many ah know now that ah always see Beryl and she's as old as me, //if no] a wee bit older.

VT: //Just.]

Mrs E: Just marches along see what ah mean? [clapping hands]. And sometimes it is a wee bit difficult makes you feel sorry for oneself. And that doesn't do any good.

VT: No.

Mrs E: It's just a moment momentary thing you know when you see Beryl striding along? Yeah it is.

And an example from Mrs C's interview :

Mrs C: Well things that you used to do you CAN'T do now, which ah can't go up the ladder now. Aye things like that, ah used to be terrible around the house, WORK workaholic ah was. Ah can see it now but no now [laughing]. There things that ah can't DO now, well ah can't clean the bathroom, if ah go forward, ah fall forward to the edge [laughing]. So ah've just to do ma best til, the eh homehelp comes, she gives it a thorough //cleanin.] ... AND things you can't do you know yourself "Oh ah'm going to do this and going t'do." You can't. There's nothin to get up in a chair and STRETCH something. Well this morning ah had to ask the fellow next-door, he came to see if ah needed shopping, noo a couple of hooks come off the curtains ah said, "Get up in that chair, John, and sort the curtains." And he sorted them [smiling]. No, but THINGS that you can't do NOW that you could USED to do, it HURTS

These two women find it difficult to adjust to their changing bodies. Mrs E is finding it difficult because her peers continue on more able than she is. Mrs C is finding it difficult because she finds it hurtful relying on others to do her housework. These women are struggling to adjust to the changes of later life and manage within the new abilities of their bodies.

Challenging the cultural realities of old age

Old age is a time of change and cultural perceptions of ageing expect particular reactions to these changes. For example, Miss H says, "Ah think sometimes, an old woman in her 80s in a hand knitted cardigan has an attractiveness about her." She expects women older than herself to wear particular types of clothes but she challenges stereotypes by paying special attention to her appearance. Miss H talks about her body and the styles she has chosen at particular stages in her life. She is conscious of the stereotypical images and makes an effort to maintain her own style :

Miss H: When ah was seventeen ah had what ma mother called ma interview coat. Ah wore a black skirt, black cardigan, and a purple coat. And it was a lovely shade of purple. And eh. Ah ah had ma hair dyed ash blonde. Diversifying one of the things ah've done is let my hair go natural. //And] ah don't wear so much make-up. ... Ma hair's cut short like this because, it's easy for me ... Ah just go for a, a dry cut. £3.50 in the hairdressers'. Ah'm into a more natural look than all this elaborate more glamour when ah was a young woman than Marilyn Monroe [laughing]. Ah had more glamour hair dyed and everything, //every] type of make-up on, nails varnished.

VT: DO you notice your body changing different you know more rapidly than it has done?

Miss H: It's more rounded, fatter.

VT: Uhuh.

Miss H: And ah ah'm not eating as much. It's eh it's just gone older. But ah [...] think ah'm conceited ah think it's fallen quite a nice way. Ah think it's fallen into quite a nice shape.

VT: Yeah.

Miss H: Ah think ah've been quite lucky. Ah had quite a pretty face when ah feel that's mebbe sagged a bit, very much so ah think. In that it's different type of face completely [laughing]. And it's a you know this has changed. ... Ah was getting ah stopped dying ma hair. When ah went to a talk on the positive older woman at Women Unlimited [a women's group in Edinburgh]. She says, "How many of you dye your hair?" And ah did ah think we all dyed our hair, and ah suddenly thought. "Ah'm not dying ma hair anymore." Dyed it since ah was sixteen and this is it's natural colour, not dyed ... it WAS lovely it was all goldeny.

VT: Mmmhuh.

Miss H: But. Ah think ah'm gonna a be a positive older woman. And then ah like ah like make-up. And ah like all that stuff but

ah'm buying quite a lot but very very cheap. As a substitute for the expensive stuff and it's probably the same stuff in different bottles [laughing]. Ah do like it today ah bought Gold Spot breathe freshener, and ah bought lavender, very cheapest.

VT: Mmmhuh.

Miss H: Lavender, because this is ma a positive older woman. Ah'm thinking of starting wearing lavender. They all at Women Unlimited all, JUMP on me, and ah say, "But ah'm wanting to be an attractive older woman." AH am NOT wanting to be a recycled teenager. Ah'm wantin to be. An attractive older woman ah think ah should enjoy my life the way it is.

Miss H is aware of the balance between challenging stereotypes and accepting the changes which occur with age. She does not want to rebel against the stereotypes because she knows her body has changed, but at the same time, she wants to have a positive experience of an ageing body. Miss H is trying to challenge the negative images of old age but also adjust to age by deciding that she will no longer dye her hair and wear less make-up.

Older women are conscious of their changing body but they also assert an enduring sense of self in their personality. Mrs E talks about her old records and told me that she thinks of herself in the same way as she did when she first listened to her records. She even forgets how long ago it is since she first listened to them. It is only Mrs E's frail body which reminds her that she is growing old. During the same piece of conversation which the extract is taken from she discusses people who appear to become bad tempered in old age, which is another stereotypical image of ageing. However, Mrs E suggests that those who are bad tempered in younger years are the ones who become bad tempered later in life :

Mrs E: Aye, well these old ma generation. Ah forget it's mebbe the third generation

VT: That's right [laughing].

Mrs E: You forget. You don't FEEL OLD in a kind a sense that you're. It's just your BODY.

VT: That's what the other ladies have said to me.

Mrs E: Aye.

VT: You your person stays the same?

Mrs E: Yes. Your personality aye.

VT: Uhuh.

Mrs E: And some seem to get quite. BAD natured. But ah think they're bad natured when they're young.

VT: Yeah I think //so.]

Mrs E: //Irritable,] you know? Don't think it's just gettin on, unless there's something wrong wi them you know?

Women at the day centre said to me, "Just give me new legs." This statement illustrates the point made by Mrs E that if their bodies were not failing them the women would be as they always had been. When the women experience physical frailty they start to describe themselves as *old*. However, they also explain that they are the same as they have always been. It is the physical changes which alter the women's self-perceptions. It is difficult to challenge the cultural images of ageing when physical changes are occurring at the same time because physical frailty signals a decline. One woman said that it was not until she was 89 that she felt old :

Jessie says that she never feels that she is 89 years old. She says not until her fall (when she broke her hip) did she stop doing things. ... She said she doesn't feel her age until she tries to do something. She said that the first time her age struck her was when she got up her ladders last year. She said she was shaking, and now she doesn't to it because "it's not fair" on her family.

September, p. 4

When the study was introduced to one of the taught classes at the day centre one woman asked why I was interviewing only women over 60 years. She had not noticed that this time in her life was different from any other. This woman emphasises the point that a personality and a sense of self are enduring. However, the difference for this woman, is that she is physically fit and has not experienced the changes in self-perception which are associated with physical frailty in later life. The day care members experience many changes at the same time which exhaust them and the effects of physical frailty reduce their energy to overcome the limitations of physical frailty. These women would not agree that physical frailty is no different than when it occurs during younger years. In addition, these women try to resist the label of *old woman* and want to deny their physical frailty so disability is different for an older woman than it is for a younger woman.

Reminiscing and reviewing

The women in this study used reminiscence to make sense of their experience as older women. First, there is a brief discussion of reminiscence from the literature. Reminiscence is acknowledged as a useful process for older people to engage in, but it has not always been considered positively. Serious consideration first began to be given to the value of reminiscence following Robert Butler's (1963) paper *The life review : An interpretation of reminiscence in old age* (Coleman, 1993b). Butler (1963) made a case for viewing reminiscence as a normal activity in old age. Older adults are said to take an overview of their lives up to that point and accept or reject the narratives they have previously constructed. Through reminiscence negative experiences can be better understood and lessons learnt and a person feels more *whole*, develops a sense of peace, even of wisdom (Coleman, 1993b). Biggs (1993) explains that life review is seen as a precursor to developmental change. Butler (1963) was careful to emphasise that as a therapeutic process life review would not be easy as it involved the retrieval of previously repressed events that required resolution. The results might be painful and not necessarily positive (Biggs, 1993). A negative outcome is possible with an obsession with past events and actions, the lack of any *solution*, or persistent feelings of guilt and depression (Coleman, 1993b).

Life review thus focuses on change as a normal occurrence in older age and suggests a view of what constitutes a desirable model of psychological integration at that stage (Biggs, 1993). Life review theory promoting *reminiscence therapy* today fulfils a function of *identity maintenance* (Coleman, 1993b). Coleman (1993b) explains that, in this way, the discrepancy between how one would like to live one's life and how one is actually leading it is minimised by stressing the value of the life already lived. In addition, reminiscence therapy promotes the traditional role of the older person as a *story teller*. Coleman (1993b) explains that both reminiscence and non-reminiscence can be expressed positively and negatively depending on the role it is fulfilling in the person's life. In this study, during initial interviews with Miss B she focused on her past. Miss B recently experienced three bereavements : the sister she had lived with since they were young, her brother, and her best friend. It is not possible to assess specifically whether her reminiscing had a positive or negative outcome but the reminiscence fulfils the function of integrating past and present experiences. Miss B reviewed her past, assessed her current situation, and placed particular events in context of her past. Miss B tries to make sense of her life by reminiscing about what

has happened to her. She assesses current decisions she has to make about living arrangements in respect of previous experiences. Miss B talked about her relationship with her sister-in-law who now wants Miss B to go and live near her. Miss B is reluctant to do this because she had a bad experience with her then sister-in-law when her brother met her. When her brother married Miss B had to move out of the farm where she had been housekeeping for her brother :

Miss B: ... Oh we [talking a about a male companion who she was close friends with but did not marry] were friends for years, afterwards and all the rest of it but eh, ah'd no intentions of marrying him and ah said that but EVERYBODY ELSE TOOK IT FOR GRANTED, you know? But n't. And eh. Ah eh, oh he was we were GREAT friends we it was rare and ah could talk to him, you know? More than ah could talk to ma brother. Ma brother was really eh, he thought the world he thought was he thought that was me fixed you know? And SHE [future sister-in-law] came on the scene and SHE says to herself, "Here's a nice man for me and here's a hoose and here's everything," and Miss B gets kicked oot. She even got in ma bed. One morning, to say good morning to him. Get up and say good morning to him at six o'clock. Got intae ma bed without asking me. That was just a LITTLE bit of the CHEEK thit went on. Ah just she made it as though ah didn't exist, that's the woman thats wants me to, join up with er at some thing or other, and ah've been warned OFF. Eh you know she's attached to, aye them, that's in there what's in there. [Pointing to an envelope she showed me earlier, containing an application form for supportive accommodation near where her brother lived and where her sister-in-law now lives alone] Eh. And ah'll be a FOOL if ah do IT. Because she's used me. ... Aye that. [Taking out the application form] It's goin back.

VT: Oh she wants you to go and live near her does she?

Miss B: Ah'd be a mug. After all the experience ah know behind it all. Mind you, in FAIRNESS to er. This was suggested BEFORE [her brother died]. You know?

VT: When your brother was still alive?

Miss B: Mmmhuh. Eh, in fairness to er THERE, BUT at the same time it was only a TALK, it wasn't but now it's. REALITY, with HER. And eh, she's that WOMAN is the head of, she's sent me that thing. Although a [...] from her makes me wonder about it, but anyhow.

Miss B's mother had sent her to live with her brother to keep house for him. She gave up a job as a civil servant to look after her brother and when she was no longer needed

she had to support herself again. Slater (1995) explains that reminiscence can be *creative reminiscing* or brooding. In the extract above, Miss B's reminiscence might be an example of brooding about the past. She reflects on how her circumstances were affected by family obligations. Earlier in the interview, Miss B explained that, "My mother was inclined to do that with her children. Use them for the benefit of her family." During a later interview, Miss B explained that she had been doing a lot of thinking and had decided to sell her house and move into supported accommodation in the local area. She appeared more relaxed and she was more focused on her current situation. The reminiscence work appeared to have a positive outcome for Miss B, although along the way it might have caused her pain to look back on difficult times. She had decided that although her sister-in-law was now her closest familial member it would not be a good idea to go and live near her.

Mrs K's example of reminiscing about how she used to enjoy parties was presented earlier. Reminiscing was a painful experience for Mrs K because she could no longer enjoy parties. Those who did not find new activities to replace their previously favoured ones found reminiscing a painful and not always productive process. The women who found that reminiscing was a sad experience were also unhappy with their lives and their memories were painful reminders of how different their lives have become. During research on reminiscence carried out in a nursing home Coleman (1993b) identified a group of older people with similar characteristics. He identified four ways that reminiscence is used or not used in adjustment to old age. The third group listed below are similar to the women in this study who have been identified as not adjusting successfully to the changes of old age :

- those who are well-adjusted and use reminiscence positively
- those who are well-adjusted who use modes other than reminiscence for adjustment
- those who are not well-adjusted and reminiscence is a painful process
- those who are not well-adjusted and avoid reminiscence

Women in this study also reminisced about past relationships and tried to make sense of how they had changed. Mrs E's husband died when they were both young and she still grieves for this loss. She wonders whether having had a good relationship makes the loss more difficult, she is trying to understand why she still grieves for the loss as

intensely as she does. She reflects on her relationship with her son and his family, explaining that they are close and care for her. She also talks about her nieces who no longer make contact with her. Her nieces' lack of concern upsets Mrs E because she looked after them when they were young because their mother was on her own :

Mrs E: Aye, you feel, "Why should you moan?"

VT: But, doesn't seem, THAT doesn't seem to help sometimes does //it?]

Mrs E: //Not] not always, no. Well it's not a pleasant THOUGHT is it? But, suppose it'll be leaving ma husband so young losing him SO ma husband so YOUNG and then he was OVERSEAS for three and half year. ... That MEBBE all that contributes to it [feeling overwhelmed] too //you] know?

And later during the interview

Mrs E: So after the War really ah had ma own PROBLEMS. Then ma ah had a happy marriage VERY happy marriage. VERY happy too happy, and of course that folded up. And it's, it's been a bit of a struggle sometimes [laughing]. But eh. Ah got helped through lass.

VT: Mmmhuh.

Mrs E: And ah've got, a good son and two grandsons, Ian [grandson] phones me every second Tuesday. Ah phone him one Tuesday.

And later during the interview

Mrs E: She's [neighbour] got nieces ah've got nieces that never even send a card.

VT: Mmm?

Mrs E: And yet ah've. [Smiling] Aye, that's ma brother that's no right, after their marriage split up. Acht it's aw a complicated business there's that's their blight. No mine. They've never been nieces in any //sense o the] way. ... They're spoiled ROTTEN. ... Got everything they wanted because they were both working with good jobs. [...] Well if they didnae want to come here what's the good there's no point there's no good o them coming eh no? ... Who they are never see them? One just got married lately she'd be about 38 she was married quietly in Spain. Ah just heard that through my sister and eh the other one, she's got a. Well a what they call them now er partner? ... N't. Oh ah didnae miss them because ah've

never had them dear. N't. [Sniff] And ma sister-in-law course ah dinnae see her, my brother's wife. They were about twenty-NINE years married.

VT: Oh.

Mrs E: No more than that. He was started drinking. And he went fae bad to worse. Just got up and left him and he went doon the hill. [In-take of breathe, clapping hands] But there it is. ... But they have forgotten who looked after them when they were young.

Mrs E reminisces about past relationships and puts them in context of current ones. She looked after her nieces when they were young but this has had no impact on her relationship with them now. She looked after her siblings because her mother and father needed her to because they were not able. She explains that one sister joined the British armed forces *as quick as she could* while Mrs E remained at home looking after her mother and foster siblings. Mrs E struggled through life and despite caring for others she has not found relationships within her family to be sources of support. When Mrs E reminisces she is not surprised by her current feeling of being overwhelmed because she explains that, "All what happens to you in life affects you." Mrs E recognises that the struggles she has faced have affected her strength and she does not have the energy to successfully face the new challenges of old age. Mrs E tries to make sense of her current feelings of anxiety by reminiscing about her life. Analysis of the interviews with Mrs E illustrates how an older woman who is feeling vulnerable perceives her life. However, interpretations of her past is made with caution because Blazer (1993) explains that when an elder is depressed they view their present and past lives through grey-coloured glasses. Mrs E might be viewing her life as an uphill struggle because she is experiencing depression and is not able to view any part of her life positively. The data show how Mrs E struggles with life and uses reminiscence as a way of understanding why it is such a struggle. Other women used reminiscence with positive outcomes for making decisions about their current.

Maintaining hope

Dorreen discussed depression with Cathy ... [S]he said you're mood is to do with "yourself" it [is] all to with keeping "hope". ... She gave an example by comparing her personality with her sister's. She said her sister was the life and soul of the party, but often became depressed, whereas she hides her feelings when she becomes depressed and when something bad happens she just doesn't let it get

her down. Betty replied by saying that “Everyone is different and we all hide things at certain times”.

March p. 6

The extract above shows Doreen describing how hope is an important way of successfully managing life. She describes hope as a vital element of maintaining well-being and preventing depression. When Doreen discussed depression with Cathy, she said that it is to do with *yourself* and that individuals have a responsibility to pull themselves together. Cathy tried to explain that it is not always easy to pull yourself together. Doreen said keeping *hope* gets people through a bad time. The example she gives is a comparison of her personality with her sister's. She said her sister is the life and soul of the party but often becomes depressed, whereas Doreen hides her feelings when she becomes depressed and when something bad happens she just *doesn't let it get her down*. Betty replied by saying that, “Everyone is different and we all hide things at certain times”. This example of a woman who maintains hope and is now compared to an example of a woman who does not have hope about her life. Mrs A finds that there is little to look forward and the extract below is a vivid example of an older woman who finds life is a struggle :

VT: OK. I've got one more question. Emm, this is to end on a better note rather than me concentrating on your bad days. Just, what sort of things do you look forward to?

Mrs A: Nothing now.

VT: Nothing?

Mrs A: Nothing, no. Nothing. Ah look forward to ma daughter [daughter in Canada], when she it's her //turn tae] phone me.

VT: //Mmmhuh.] Yup.

Mrs A: ... And it's aw the same price nowadays, night or day. But eh, no ah sort o look forward tae er phonin. Though we were we were only on about quarter an hour on Sunday an usually when ah'm on ah'm on for half an hoor, but ah'd nothin much to say.

VT: Uhuh.

Mrs A: But eh, that's the only thing that ah look forward and ah look forward tae phonin Jenny [sister who lives in Edinburgh] though ten minutes [laughing] sometimes no ten minutes

ken? But eh. No ah, ah just there's nothin to look forward tae
EXCEPT, the coffin.

Successful and unsuccessful ageing

This section presents comparisons of women who are experiencing similar changes in their lives but manage these changes differently. The example below compares Bertha and Mrs K because they both have heart disease and both enjoy socialising and going to parties. It is useful to compare these women because initially it might be understandable why Mrs K has experienced depressive episodes recently. Mrs K is no longer able to enjoy her usual things and she is depressed about this. Neither of these women can now get up and dance at parties as they used to but Bertha has developed a strategy which maintains her enjoyment at a party :

Bertha went on to discuss how she keeps herself bright and cheerful. She says that she is a person who can "bounce back" [these are her words]. ... She gives an example of how she copes with her changing body. She now just sits and jigs in the chair, because she cannot get up and dance. [she doesn't feel useless because her body is changing. She just finds new ways to enjoy herself.]

June, p. 71

Compared to :

Mrs K: Aye. The minute the band started the feet started tae go, ah says, "Away. We'll no keep that yin doon at aw." SHE keeps the party going REALLY. And she stone deaf. It's the vibration.

VT: OK.

Mrs K: Yeah, and she reads your lips of course. But oh she's an awful lassie. And ah haud went to the toilet and come back an she gets a haud o me, the airms and she's. Ah says, "Oh Sissy for God sakes dinnae let me go" [laughing]. Ah said, "Enjoy your dance?" Ah say, "Oh aye ah did," [laughing]. Never moved off the one spot but. ... The thing is wi the legs being useless you cannae enjoy any FUN. You just sit back in a corner.

VT: Uhuh.

Mrs K: Ken? Cos even at, ah didnae even couldnae even get up fir ma grandson's wedding. Ah just got sat at a table and that was you.

The two examples show different ways of adjusting to the changes of old age. Bertha can be described as someone who can *bounce back*. She has found alternative ways to enjoy the parties whereas Mrs K misses not being able to get up and dance as she used to. From the analysis of these data it is not possible to discover whether Mrs K becomes depressed because she can no longer join in or whether the depressive illness has a negative impact on the way she perceives her current situation. It is clear that the two women are in similar circumstances but adjust to their situation in contrasting ways.

Another example is from conversations with a woman called Jessie. Appendix B includes extracts of conversations with Jessie over the period of participant observation. Over the period of participation at the day centre, she showed that despite physical frailty and difficult social circumstances she manages to stay cheerful. Jessie has days when she feels vulnerable and begins to become overwhelmed by her situation but despite these days she manages to keep her spirits high. Her experiences are in contrast to those women who become overwhelmed by their circumstances and do not manage to stay cheerful. Analysis of the conversations with Jessie reveals that as health problems occur there are fluctuations in her abilities to manage with the changes of later life and her self-perception changes. Overall she manages to adjust successfully to the changes of later life. The analysis presented here shows that women in difficult circumstances manage to adjust positively to the changes of later life.

Summary

The data above were used to present a picture of depression in older women and the struggles they experience. In the late onset depression literature it is explained that when older people experience depression they have a tendency to deny symptoms of depression. Analysis of the data from this study revealed that the same trend was evident among the women who were interviewed. It was only through careful listening and inquiry that the symptoms were identified (Baldwin, 1988; Blazer, 1993). The literature is beginning to emphasise the need for practitioners to increase their

awareness of depression which causes mild symptoms which are treatable. For example, the work of the Royal College of Psychiatrists work on the Defeat Depression Campaign with the Royal College of General Practitioners (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1997). These symptoms of depression are not an inevitable reaction to old age and all it brings or an inevitable consequence of growing old (Pitt, 1982). The data were used to show that when women experiencing depression sought support from others friends and family were unable to provide the support the women sought. Friends and family suggest to the women that they try harder to pull themselves together. Scrutton (1989) describes the potential value of therapeutic relationships for older people and professionals can fulfil the role which family are unable to.

The women try to make sense of their situation and so do others. Others suggest that the women get more involved in social activities to take their minds off depressing thoughts. The women explained that they have lost their enjoyment of favourite activities and are finding it difficult to concentrate and therefore the other women's suggestions will not work. Like Mrs E, the women who experience depression compare themselves to others who are in similar or worse situations and do not understand why they have failed to adjust as well as others have. The women search for a reason why they have reacted in the way they have and explain away their experience as a negative personality trait. The women blame themselves for their depression and this blame fits with other people's opinion that the women should try harder to pull themselves together.

In this chapter, intimacy in the lives of older women has been explored with women who enjoy socialising and women who are lifelong isolates. Both groups have described difficulties with intimacy when they experience physical frailty. Those who enjoy socialising rely on others to come and visit them and take them out. They find it difficult not being able to initiate social occasions themselves and being dependent on others. Those who are lifelong isolates are frustrated by unwanted visitors to their house who they cannot escape from because their physical frailties prevent them having an excuse of going out. Those women who were having difficulty adjusting in later life found spending time on their own difficult. They became lonely and isolated and did not enjoy their favourite activities which they used to do on their own.

Some women mentioned confidantes but these relationships were not providing the support these women needed at this time in their life. The survey research suggests

that the lack of a confidante is the significantly most reliable factor for predicting depressive illness (Brown & Harris, 1978; Murphy, 1982). The findings from this study provide understanding about those individuals who develop depression but who do not fall into the *high risk* group because although they experience the provoking agents this group are *protected* by the social buffers of a confidante. For example, some women who reported having a confidante still felt isolated and lonely. Perhaps when examined in detail these relationships would not fulfil the confidante criteria but the examples illustrate that women who are feeling overwhelmed by life require a higher level of support than their friends and family can provide.

Living arrangements had a significant impact on the women's opportunities for intimacy. For example, different sheltered housing schemes offered different levels of social events and those with a number of events facilitated a meaningful social life for their residents. Some women who had lived by themselves all their lives had difficulties finding new sources of intimacy as old ones disappeared because they were shy and unable to initiate social relationships. Expressing sexuality was a positive experience for women in this study, whether they were struggling with life or not. The women enjoyed each other's chat on the subject and positively created images of themselves as women growing older. One woman desperately missed the sexual intimacy of her husband but overall this was not area of struggle for the women and they continued to enjoy the gentle romantic encounters they experienced flirting with the few male members there were at the day centres.

This chapter illustrated women's different reactions to the changes associated with later life. The chapter showed that physical illness has significant affect on the lives of older women. When disability occurs in later life a woman begins to perceive herself as the stereotypical images of oldness which she rejected before she experienced physical frailty. The older women who experienced good health tended not to *feel their age* whereas other women who experienced frailty accept negative stereotypes about what it means to be old. The study revealed that self-perception changes with physical illness because if the women developed a disability they redefined themselves as old. From the analysis it emerged that the women engaged in reminiscing to try to make sense of their current circumstances. Similar to Coleman's (1993b) findings, some participants found reminiscing a positive experience but for others it was a

painful experience. Some who accept this label manage to adjust successfully to the changes of later life but others lose hope.

Conclusion

Implications of the Findings

The study presented here develops understanding about factors which affect adjustment in later life among older women. Women who were successfully adjusting in their old lives were compared alongside those who were struggling in their old lives. The study showed that circumstances alone do not affect adjustment in later life. Those who do not find meaning in later life do not adjust successfully and experience distress in later life. This is compared to women who find meaning in their old lives, adjust successfully, and enjoy a happy old age. In this final chapter, there will be a consideration of what implications can be drawn from the findings. There will be an exploration of how the findings from this study contribute to the gerontology literature; a reflection on how the research process was carried out; a discussion of practice and policy implications; and suggestions for further work.

Contributing to the gerontology literature

In this section, the critique of Erikson's (1965) lifespan development theory presented in Chapter One will be developed further to set the findings of the study within the context of the gerontology literature. Erikson's theory of lifespan development focuses on adjustment in life and has been an influential theory for understanding the experiences of ageing. He describes the positive outcome of adjustment within eight stages of life as psychological well-being. His theory of ageing is set within the context of psychological development and the acceptance of one's one and only life (Coleman, 1993b). He suggests that the acceptance of one's one and only life is vital for psychological integrity in old age. The data from the study presented here were used in the analysis chapters to present understanding about the factors which affect adjustment in later life among older women. Erikson's lifespan development theory could have been an appropriate context for exploring the lives of older women who took part in this study. Erikson's theory would suggest that those who achieve integrity adjust successfully in later life and experience psychological well-being. This is compared to those who do not manage to adjust successfully in later life and do not achieve the satisfactory level of integrity necessary for psychological well-being. Participants in this study could be described as women who have achieved integrity

and women who have not achieved integrity in later life. The former experiencing adjustment in later life and a happy old age and the latter struggling with adjustment in later life and experiencing an unsuccessful old age. In this study, the central concept of adjustment reflects a successful happy old age and it is compared to Erikson's concept of integrity reflecting psychological well-being in later life.

The data from the study presented here were scrutinised to find evidence to support Erikson's (1965) theory of psychological lifespan development. The data were examined to discover whether they could be used to illustrate the following essential characteristics of integrity (Coleman, 1993b; p. 102) :

- acceptance of one's life and the way it has been lived
- abandonment of a self-centred view of life and the movement to a transcend interest in human-kind
- acceptance and loss of fear of death

On the first characteristic of *acceptance of one's life and the way it has been lived* : in this study, when the women who were struggling with life talked about their lives there was no evidence of a series of *regrets* about what they had done, or not done, how they had acted, or how they experienced their life. These women as well as women who experienced a successful old age openly discussed their sadnesses but there was no evidence of life regrets. Women who were not successfully adjusting in later life did not have difficulty accepting their one and only life. A lack of this characteristic was found to reflect a lack of integrity in later life rather than achievement of integrity. On the second characteristic of *abandonment of a self-centred view of life* : Erikson suggests that older people trying to integrate life long experiences begin to perceive their parts in human history from the perspective of belonging to a particular generation. Thus, they take on the responsibility of peers' actions, for example the atrocities of wars. Integration is experienced when older individuals think that they have been part of a successful generation and they experience regrets if they do not think that their generation has left something positive behind them (Blazer, 1993). Women in this study have concern for others, for example the theme of *the state of the world* showed that they were saddened by world and political events. In contrast to Erikson's theory, in this study when women talked about world and political events which had distressed them they did not show disgust about what they had been part of

through their generation or the legacy their generation was leaving behind them. They showed sympathy for those who experienced these distressing events but were not personally ashamed of being a part of society which caused them. The women in this study showed that they did not have a self-centred view of life but it was their emotional reaction to world and political events which was significant. They were not concerned about the part their peer or generational group played in an event, whether positive or negative.

On the third characteristic of *acceptance and loss of the fear of death* : in contrast to Erikson's theory, women in this study who were successfully adjusting in later life showed less of a loss of fear of death than those women who were struggling with their old lives. Erikson suggests that integration in later life is illustrated by an acceptance that life is nearing its end. Women in this study who enjoyed their old lives embraced every *extra day* they had. These women were still enjoying themselves and although they did not perceive their death as an impending doom they regretted that they would die. Women who were not adjusting successfully in old age did not care whether they would live another day because they were not enjoying their current life. They accepted their nearing death and did not fear it but this acceptance was not a sign that they were successfully adjusting or experiencing psychological well-being in later life. Rather, their loss of fear of death was a sign that they were struggling with life and in contrast to Erikson's theory experiencing an unsuccessful adjustment.

The characteristics which Erikson (1965) describes as essential to integrity were not evident in the data which were generated from this study. The study shows that older women who adjust to their old lives successfully display signs of integrity but it is not manifest in the ways Erikson describes in his lifespan development theory. The conclusion from this study is that women who did not adjust successfully in later life were struggling to find meaning within the three major categories : *explaining depression; intimacy in the lives of older women; and managing change in later life*. The core category of *searching meaning* has three properties : *context, abilities and desires*. These three properties of meaning illustrate the aspects of the three major categories through which the women tried to find meaning in later life. Among the participants in this study, the three essential characteristics of Erikson's theory are not evident. The findings do not provide evidence about the relevancy of Erikson's description of integrity for understanding adjustment in later life among older women.

This finding is significant because Erikson's lifespan development theory is one of the few psychological theories of development which includes later life and it is considered a "a fruitful context for the study of the psychology of ageing" (Bond et al., 1993; p. 29). The study presented here provides empirical evidence that the theory's relevance for understanding adjustment in the lives of older women should be questioned.

Reflections on the research process

First in this section, there is a reflective account of my role in data collection and analysis. When carrying out the participant observation I spent time with women at the day centre. I joined in their day-to-day conversations and they approached me to tell me about their struggles. From the start of the data collection, the participant observation produced interesting and relevant data about adjustment in later life. In contrast, recruiting participants for audio-taped interviews took longer than anticipated and there might be different reasons for this happening. Data collection at the first day centre was carried out over six months and perhaps over this time I lost the positive affect of anonymity which was present during the first few months of data collection. When approached to take part in an audio-taped interview women became reluctant to discuss their difficulties with me. The women had fun together at the day centre and attempts to tell others about painful events were usually rebuked. By joining in with the fun interactions at the day centre it might have been difficult for women then to show me a different, contrary, side of themselves which revealed vulnerabilities they were continually told to hide. At the second day centre, I did not have difficulty in recruiting participants for an in-depth interview. I stayed for a shorter time at this centre and maintained the positive affect of anonymity.

In addition, during the early stages of the research process I was not confident about encouraging reluctant women to take part in an audio-taped interview. I was wary because the literature suggests that older people might think they are obliged to take part in health and social care research to continue receiving care in the setting where the research is being carried out (Butler, 1990). On the contrary, women who did not want to take part in an interview could not be persuaded otherwise whereas other women were volunteered when I told them how important their stories were to other women. It became apparent that it was not necessary to be overly concerned about persuading initially reluctant participants to take part in an audio-taped interview.

Later during the research, I was less cautious in my approach to recruiting potential participants for the audio-taped interviews. This less cautious approach was boosted when I met with women after they participated in an audio-taped interview. Women told me the interview was a positive experience and this gave me the confidence to encourage other women to take part in an audio-taped interview. At the second day centre, I had confidence to recruit participants more actively and this was a successful strategy.

Perhaps by reviewing the research process earlier and more frequently I could have realised that I needed to employ different strategies to find participants for the in-depth interviews. Instead, I used this time to build up the participant observation data. It was an invaluable research strategy which has allowed comparison of experiences between women who are experiencing a successful old age with those who are struggling with their old age. The time was also used to engage in the grounded theory technique of beginning data analysis from the start of the research. Carrying out the ongoing data analysis gave me the opportunity to build up a meaningful analytic framework of the data. As a novice researcher, the delays in recruiting participants to audio-taped interviews gave me time to think about how to proceed with the research and to effectively employ the grounded theory technique of theoretical sampling to direct the concurrent data collection and analysis. Had the data come in fast and furiously I might have been overwhelmed by the *mountain of data* waiting to be analysed (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973).

Lastly in this section, a reflection on the analysis and the use of existing literature to support the findings. The data analysis was carried out using the incident by incident technique described in the grounded theory approach to qualitative research. The data were coded alongside similar incidents within a theoretical note which described the action taking place in the data. As the data collection and data analysis progressed concepts illustrated by the theoretical codes were searched for within the existing gerontology literature. By searching the existing literature I discovered whether other researchers had revealed similar or conflicting experiences among older women. When *writing-up* the categories for the thesis some of the themes which had been identified within the data could not be meaningfully developed in the thesis. Themes were left out if they did not elaborate understanding about adjustment in later life

among older women. Time could have been saved if I waited to look for supporting evidence in the gerontology literature when I began writing-up the categories.

In summary, I am satisfied with how the research was carried out. Problems which developed during the research were managed and I have learnt lessons for carrying out future projects. My professional experience as a staff nurse was useful for developing techniques for collecting meaningful qualitative data because in my work I have mostly nursed older people and understand the need for sensitive communication skills. Through research methods courses I developed techniques to analyse data and the support of my supervisors helped me respond positively to difficulties in the research design.

Reflections on grounded theory

Descriptions of how to carry out the coding and memoing of data using the grounded theory approach to qualitative research led to disagreement between Glaser and Strauss. Strauss & Corbin (1990) outline an approach to identify codes in the data through the interdependent processes of data collection and data analysis based on Glaser & Strauss's (1967) work. However, Glaser (1992) argues that their aims differ from his. Glaser (1992) suggests that Strauss & Corbin (1990) aim to identify themes whereas Glaser (1978) outlines a method which aims to generate a theory which explains the connection and links between concepts. He explains that Strauss & Corbin (1990) describe coding as a procedural task.

Interestingly, this discussion is mirrored in the literature which supports the use of software packages to manage the handling of qualitative data. For example, Dey (1996) is developing a software package for qualitative data analysis. He agrees that the approach which these packages require for the data analysis make them inherently procedural. Glaser (1992) would claim that this emphasis on procedures limits the packages' usefulness for discovering meaningful findings from qualitative data. Dey (1996) defends the use of computer packages to handle and manage qualitative data analysis. He explains that the analytical potential of these clerical tasks should not be overlooked. It cannot be denied that coding incidents becomes a procedural task because all new data are searched for examples which illustrate existing codes. Schatzman & Strauss (1973) explain that doing the clerical tasks prevents the researcher being overwhelmed by a *mountain of data* at the end of the research. Dey

(1996) defends criticisms that software packages mechanicalise qualitative data analysis and he explains that researchers cannot separate the clerical tasks from the analytic process of comparisons and pattern making. He suggests that software packages are developed to handle the intensive period of clerical work which is required by the grounded theory approach of coding every incident, and this prevents researchers becoming overwhelmed by a mountain of data. The conceptual and analytical tasks are less evident than the mechanical aspects of coding but although not so obvious, coding and retrieval are also analytical processes. He suggests that identification of patterns and comparisons is more systematic than at first evident and the software packages aid this process. For example, novice researchers begin with separate codes for each concept and might not have the sociological imagination to develop them into a theoretical framework with abstract links. Adopting a procedural approach and using a software package to aid this process might free up the novice researcher's mind for developing meaningful links between concepts and prevent them becoming overwhelmed by a mountain of data.

In contrast, Glaser (1992) suggests that it is the procedures inherent within Strauss & Corbin's (1990) approach which restricts the development of meaningful theory. Researchers, particularly novices researchers, might easily become over attentive to the procedures Strauss & Corbin's (1990) describe and neglect their sociological imagination. Glaser (1992) criticises Strauss & Corbin's (1990) text for its programmatic and overformulaic approach. Melia (1996) suggests that in criticising Strauss for a formulaic reproduction of something called grounded theory, Glaser (1992) has forgotten the formulaic approach of his eighteen coding families and his eleven criteria of a core category in Glaser (1978). In their favour, the Strauss & Corbin (1990) text, although a seemingly prescriptive description of a number of procedures and techniques, is a more accessible approach to understanding the grounded theory approach than previous grounded theory texts have been. The dense nature of the language in the original texts makes the use of grounded theory inaccessible (Melia, 1982). Strauss & Corbin (1990) provide an approach which is doable by new researchers. By adopting Strauss & Corbin's (1990) approach novice researchers are enabled to develop techniques for carrying out social research. Glaser (1992) criticises their approach and suggests that researchers must develop Strauss & Corbin's (1990) techniques further to discover theory from data which goes beyond the

initial substantive coding. He claims that Strauss & Corbin (1990) do not provide the means with which to develop grounded theory.

This discussion has evolved into an academic debate about the aims and purposes of qualitative research (Stern, 1994; Melia, 1996). Strauss & Corbin (1990) and Glaser (1992) disagree about whether the aim of qualitative research should be *full conceptual description* or the development of valid explanations and theories (Melia, 1996). Glaser and Strauss have been concerned with particular methods of grounded theory and the consequences on the outcomes of the research process. Glaser (1992) suggests that Strauss & Corbin (1990) ignored the explanatory aim of grounded theory. To carry out the study presented in this thesis the grounded theory approaches were reviewed. Strauss & Corbin's (1990) work shows that they do emphasise the importance of explanation rather than description. For example, when Strauss & Corbin (1990; p. 51) describe the use of *technical literature* they suggest that published descriptive material can be used to enhance theoretical sensitivity but explain that these writings often give very accurate descriptions of reality but little interpretation. They explain that descriptions of reality add to the knowledge base of the researcher but, "in grounded theory studies, you want to explain phenomena" not merely describe the behaviour (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; p. 49).

When describing how to write-up a thesis or monograph from a grounded theory study Strauss & Corbin (1990) emphasise the importance of writing on a conceptual level and keeping description secondary. In addition, they list a set of criteria for judging a grounded theory study and number three is : "Are there many conceptual linkages and are the categories well developed? Do they have conceptual density?" They explain that the tight linkages between categories give theory its explanatory power, without which the theory is less than satisfactory. Strauss & Corbin (1990) describe the differences between theory and description. They explain that theory uses concepts that place interpretations on data by grouping the data and giving them conceptual labels. The concepts are related by statements of relationships. In description, data might be organised according to themes. Themes might be conceptualisations of the data, but are more likely to be a summary of words taken directly from the data. There is little, if any, interpretation of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Glaser & Strauss (1967) addressed the question of pure description versus explanations and theories. The question reappeared when Glaser (1992) criticised Strauss & Corbin

(1990) for deviating from the aims of grounded theory. He suggests that Strauss & Corbin (1990) provide a method of mere *full conceptual description*. Glaser (1992) claims that Strauss has modified grounded theory out of existence. He questions whether studies claiming to have used grounded theory have actually done so. Melia (1996) points out that in the original text Glaser & Strauss (1967) say that grounded theory can be modified. Melia (1996) suggests that Glaser's description of finding themes emerging from the data is a somewhat naïve approach to expect other researchers to take. Not all researchers have the imagination of Glaser and Strauss and it should be legitimate for the researchers to explain how they have used the grounded theory approach. Perhaps Strauss & Corbin's (1990) approach is merely a beginning. Or perhaps new software packages will free researchers' time when carrying out the clerical task of the constant comparative method, and they will have more time to develop their sociological imagination and use the grounded theory approach more fruitfully. Glaser (1992) is likely to suggest that Strauss & Corbin's (1990) approach should be avoided because it inhibits sociological imagination and the development of grounded theory regardless of any packages which aid data handling. In the study presented in this thesis, Glaser's (1978) approach was adopted and from the beginning an aim of the research was to search for a core category which illustrated links between major categories to explain the participants' social behaviour. Overall, his methods provide an explicit approach to guide the research process whereas in other research methods texts this sometimes remains an implied process rather than being explicitly explained by the author. In the study presented here, from the beginning of the research Glaser's (1978) techniques were used to purposefully collect data and use the analysis to seek a meaningful understanding about adjustment among older women from the analysis.

Implications for practice

Ageing and other social phenomena can be understood by focusing on individuals' interpretation of their experience. By listening to individuals' interpretation of their circumstances practitioners can begin to understand what aspects of older persons' circumstances are significant to them. This thesis provides practitioners with a framework from which to begin to understand women's experiences of ageing. It is important for practitioners to learn appropriate ways of supporting older people making choices about their future as their situations change because of : retirement; changing social roles; having more free time; being in a better or worse financial

situation; bereavement; changing social networks; physical incapacity; and so on. Listening to older people will reveal what factors significantly affect their experiences of ageing. Practitioners might do this in their daily practice but older people will experience greater benefits if practitioners adopt a framework which meaningfully directs the focus of their attention on the older person they are caring for. The findings from this study provide a framework to focus practitioners' attention on the significant factors which affect adjustment in later life among older women. The findings from this study show that three major categories affect adjustment in later life among older women : *explaining depression; intimacy in the lives of older women; and managing change in later life.*

It is hypothesised here, that if practitioners focus their work with older women around the three major categories they can support older women in their attempts to make sense of their old lives and experience a successful old age. In this study, for those participants who were struggling with adjustment in later life the three major categories were the most significant aspects of their lives with which they were struggling. Further analysis, through the development of a core category from the data showed that when carrying out their adjustment work the women in engaged in the process of *searching for meaning*. Three properties of the core category were discovered and labelled the three properties of meaning : *context, abilities, and desires*. The three properties of meaning were evaluated across each of the three major categories and when women found meaning within the three properties of meaning they enjoyed a successful old age. In contrast, when the women did not find meaning in the major categories they needed to do adjustment work within each of the three properties of meaning to experience a successful old age. When practitioners notice women are not adjusting positively to old age they should try to discover why this is happening. The findings from this study show that circumstance alone does not affect whether an older woman's experience of ageing is successful or unsuccessful. Practitioners can provide support to those who struggle with life in old age and help them adjust in the same positive way as others do, despite difficult circumstances. The findings show that those who are struggling with their old lives do not receive sufficient support from family or friends to adjust successfully in later life. Bond & Coleman (1993) explain that professional care would help relieve older people's distress which cannot be alleviated by family or friends.

Blazer (1993) explains how practitioners can discover whether an older person is struggling with meaning in later life. He suggests that listening over many days and weeks enables the clinician to determine if a theme of meaninglessness challenges the psychologic integrity of the elder (Blazer, 1993). Blazer (1993) explains that meaninglessness not only manifests itself in depressive symptoms but in other symptoms which might mask the existential despair of the older adult. Therefore, developing a relationship with the older person is vital to recognising whether they are struggling in later life. Depressive illness might be a manifestation of a sense of meaninglessness but other signs also show a sense of meaninglessness. Developing a relationship with an older woman will provide a means by which to assess whether she is struggling with her old life. During this study the women revealed aspects of themselves which indicated they were struggling with their lives. In some examples, this was discovered during initial conversations because I made myself available to the women and they revealed intimate aspects of themselves to me which showed they were struggling with meaning in later life. It might not need the weeks of listening which Blazer (1993) describes as essential to discover a sense of meaninglessness. The type of approach adopted with older people will also determine whether the practitioner can discover whether an older person is struggling to find meaning in later life.

Stevenson (1989; p. 18) presents a more pessimistic view about the possible outcomes from working older people struggling to find meaning in their lives. She suggests that for "those older people who are reflective, there is a kind of existential depression which has to be borne and for which there is no remedy." I am challenging this assumption and I use the findings from this study to illustrate that when women in this study engaged in a process of searching for meaning. It shows that they are attempting to resolve difficult issues and not merely hopelessly reflecting on existential issues. Women who experienced distress, because they could not make sense of their old lives, were struggling to find meaning in their old lives. They offered explanations about what they were experiencing but they did not find satisfactory answers to their questions. This effort illustrates that if they were supported to work through their concerns their experiences might not be hopeless. On their own, there is no remedy to their existential reflection but with support women who are struggling with their old lives might adjust and experience a successful happy old age. Existential reflections indicate a willingness to try to find meaning and this willingness shows hope and not

hopelessness. Any hopelessness would be the practitioner's failure to discover how to support an older person rather than the older person's existential reflections. Stevenson (1989) infers that older people who failed to find meaning in life are hopeless cases. Some older people who receive support might fail to find meaning in later life but the findings from this study suggest there is a framework which could be used to structure adjustment work. Adopting this framework could be a successful way of supporting older women to experience a happy old age.

Scrutton's (1989) work provides a useful insight into how to engage older people and develop therapeutically meaningful relationships with older people. His work is a valuable starting place for practitioners to develop the necessary skills to find out whether an older person is struggling with life in old age. He describes the importance of developing empathy with the older person and meaningfully listening to their stories. Empathy is used as a way to legitimise individuals' pain and provide support to alleviate their pain (Scrutton, 1989). The women in this study who were struggling with life in old age would benefit from the support of the therapeutic relationships described by Scrutton (1989). The findings from this study could be used to structure the work of a therapeutic relationship around the three properties of meaning and three major categories and facilitate adjustment in later life. Combining a therapeutic relationship with the findings from this study would provide meaningful support for older women struggling with their old lives which helps them find meaning in later life and enjoy their old age.

Doing adjustment work within the three properties of meaning across the three major categories appeared to be a successful formula for many women at the day centre. It is suggested here that other women could be supported in their efforts to adjust in old age using the successful formula which women in similar circumstance use. There is no reason to believe that given the appropriate support older people are no less willing or able than other adults are to find meaning in their lives. The majority of older people are satisfied with their lives and using the framework outlined in this study it is suggested that practitioners can provide older women with support to find meaning in their old lives. Other authors interested in the lives of older people suggest that a solution to the existential crisis might be reached by another person listening to and empathising with the elder (Scrutton, 1989; Blazer, 1993). Acknowledging and legitimising the questioning and searching which the older person is engaging in is a

starting point of the healing process. This study takes the process of listening and empathising a step further with a framework with which to focus the practitioners' attention on the older person.

Practitioners supporting older women's adjustment work

In this next section of the chapter there is a discussion of how practitioners can support older women carry out appropriate adjustment work within the three properties of meaning. Examples of each of the properties of meaning will be illustrated using one of the major categories. The property of *context* will be evaluated within the major category of *explaining depression*. An evaluation of context requires older women to become aware of how their world has changed in later life. This might be a painful process but a necessary one. If an evaluation is not made and the appropriate adjustment work is not carried out older women will experience their old age without knowing how their world has changed. They will be interacting falsely within their world, or in bad faith, as Sartre describes it (see Chapter One). When older women engage in this process of evaluation they need support in how to adjust to their changing context. To support women who are struggling in later life practitioners need to become aware of how the woman's world has changed. Within the major category of explaining depression it is important that older women recognise that their lives have changed because otherwise they will not understand why they are struggling with life. Some of the women in this study appeared to experience distress in their lives but told me, "I'm all right really dear." The data show that they were not "all right". These women were showing signs of depressive illness and needed support to recognise that their experiences were legitimate, considering their circumstance and despite knowing that peers were adjusting successfully in similar or more difficult circumstances. The women needed to accept that life was overwhelming them and they needed support to work out how they could learn to adjust to their current context. Continuing to deny context has a negative impact on the emotional and mental well-being of older women and prevents them working out what adjustment work they need to do. Practitioners can support women in this process and provide assurance that it is legitimate to admit being overwhelmed by life. With support they can work out what adjustment work needs to be carried out to find meaning within the property of context across each of the three major categories.

The property of *abilities* will be evaluated within the major category of *intimacy in the lives of older women*. Intimacy was expressed by sharing with others and spending time alone. When the women experienced physical frailty and there were changes in their social networks they sometimes struggled to experience meaningful intimacy in their lives. Practitioners can provide support to women who are missing intimacy in their lives. Practitioners need to find out what is preventing an older woman experiencing intimacy and find out what abilities they are lacking to fulfil a need for intimacy. Adjustment within the property of abilities requires practical support to live successfully with changing abilities. For example, one woman in the study missed telephoning her friend because her friend did not have a telephone in her room in the residential home where she moved to recently. It became difficult for the women to find convenient times to telephone each other. Another woman missed spending time at the seaside on her own. Another woman could not go down to the communal area in the sheltered housing where she lived because she could not walk to the lift which would take her there. These women need support to find out who could assist them with these practical needs and overcome the obstacles to their intimacy. It would appear that these obstacles are not difficult to overcome but these women experienced a loss of intimacy in their lives because their abilities had not been evaluated and the appropriate adjustment work had not been carried out. Practitioners could support women within the property of abilities and older women would not experience a lack of something simply because practical obstacles are overlooked.

Lastly, the property of *desire* will be evaluated within the major category of *managing change in later life*. It is more difficult for a practitioner to support adjustment work within the property of desire than it is within the other two properties of meaning. Within the property of context, practitioners can support older women to recognise how their life has changed and acknowledge that they need to adjust to these changes. Within the property of abilities, practitioners can identify practical support to overcome difficulties which prevent them finding meaning in later life. In contrast, within the property of desire older women might need to do much psychological work to adjust to new desires when their context and abilities change in later life. Carrying out adjustment work within the properties of context and abilities will enhance a woman's opportunities for experiencing her desires but it is also likely that she needs to adjust her desires to her changing context and abilities. For example, in this study two of the women enjoyed going to parties and dancing. Both of them have supportive

families who ensure they attend family events and both of them are socially outgoing women and make sure they attend local social events they are interested in (context). However, both of them have diagnosed heart conditions and they cannot join in at parties as they used to (abilities). One of these women has adjusted successfully to her current life and has learnt to enjoy going to parties in new ways. She is content tapping her foot along to music. This woman has done the appropriate adjustment within the property of desire and has found a new way to experience her desire of being socially active and joining in at parties. In contrast, the other woman becomes sad when she goes to parties. She yearns for the days when she was on the dance floor dancing to the music. This woman would benefit from support to do the appropriate adjustment work within the property of desire to stop yearning for something which she is unlikely to be able to do. Even with appropriate adjustment work within the properties of context and abilities she is unlikely to dance as she used to and therefore to enjoy once again the parties she goes to she needs to adjust her desires. This woman needs to learn how to experience life as it is now, as the other woman has done. It is difficult for her to adjust to a changing body which cannot do what she wants it to do but the other woman shows that it is possible. Practitioners will need special skills to support older women adjust within the property of desire because adjusting to new desires might be a painful process but the outcome is a successful happy old age.

The discussion above suggests ways practitioners can support older women adjust to their old lives. It is not acceptable for women to have low expectations to aim for in their old lives but to live an authentic life women need to perceive themselves genuinely in their current life. Otherwise, they will experience bad faith and the distress of living a life which is a continuing struggle because unrealistic goals are aimed for. With the support of practitioners older women need to evaluate their context, abilities and desires and discover what it means to them to be living their current life. Those women who successfully adjust in later life recognise the interaction between the three properties of meaning and live a happy old age. Those who do not evaluate the three properties of meaning fail to recognise the impact of their old lives on their perceptions and experiences of life. In this study, it is hypothesised that women who fail to recognise the significance of the three properties of meaning on the three major categories struggle to find meaning in later life and do not experience a successful old age. Practitioners can support older women who struggle with their old lives to do the appropriate adjustment work to experience a

successful happy old age. This support is structured around the evaluation of the three properties of meaning within each of the three major categories.

Implications for policy

Mann (1995) discusses possible future changes in social policy and resource allocation within mental health services for older people which are relevant to this study. Adjustment in later life is considered here as a potential mental health problem because psychological well-being can be threatened when an older person lacks meaning in life and is struggling with adjustment. Mann (1995) questions the role of a specialist psychogeriatric service and wonders whether a change in focus will take place within service planning as care in the community is developed further. He claims that social problems which result in mental health problems might not need to be treated by psychogeriatricians and that in the future funds will be diverted to local non-psychiatric projects. Less severe mental problems will no longer be ignored because new services will develop to care for people who have so far been neglected by psychogeriatrics because their problems are not "clinically significant". Struggling with adjustment in later life is an example of a problem which causes distress to an older person but which might not be "clinically significant". Brown (1987) also discusses the changing roles of psychiatrists. In a review of admissions to in-patient psychiatric wards he has found that mental health problems are caused by social circumstances but only individuals who display suicidal behaviour are being treated by psychiatrists. Severity of symptoms or a clinical diagnosis of depression does not result in a referral to the psychiatric services. Referrals to a specialist are made only when individuals display suicidal behaviour. The social origins of psychiatric illnesses are ignored and psychiatric services manage problems which meet specific criteria, such as suicidal behaviour. This shows that the difficulties associated with adjustment in later life are being ignored by psychiatrists and therefore a different approach is required to care for someone experiencing a lack of meaning.

The findings from the study presented here illustrate the potential for practitioners to support older women in their adjustment work to experience a successful happy old age. If Mann's (1995) predictions come true and psychiatric services take a change in focus the findings from this study could be accommodated by practitioners in local non-psychiatric services to support women carry out their adjustment work in later life. Service provision needs to be more flexible and imaginative to provide support for a

wide range of health and social needs which might not necessarily be diagnosable using traditional diagnostic criteria (Mann, 1995). This approach to service planning might also reduce the numbers of non-clinical problems which become chronic psychiatric illnesses because of a lack of early recognition of their significance and a reluctance to initiate a therapeutic intervention (Baldwin, 1991b).

Future research

This study has explored adjustment in later life among older women. Three major categories affect adjustment in later life among older women and it is the interaction of these categories through the core category of searching for meaning which affects adjustment. It is now important to take this work forward in seminar teaching sessions with practitioners. Psychological theorists hypothesise about the factors which affect adjustment in later life and quantitative studies describe risk factors of late onset depression. The work presented in this thesis provides empirical evidence about the factors which affect adjustment in later life. Explaining these factors to practitioners will illustrate what aspects of older women's lives are significant to experiencing a happy successful old age. This study has shown that circumstances alone do not determine whether an older woman experiences a happy successful old age. By comparing residents in a care home, who are mostly frail elderly people, practitioners will recognise that some residents adjust successfully when others fail to. The determining characteristic of an older woman who experiences a happy old age is whether she successfully adjusts and can find meaning in her life.

This work should be shared with qualified and unqualified practitioners. For example, Hughes (1997) suggests that home helps need to be well informed and able to recognise when clients are experiencing psychological distress. Different practitioners will provide varying levels of therapeutic intervention but most should be able to recognise distress. An aspect of the work presented in this thesis which requires a multi-disciplinary approach to take it forward is determining what therapeutic interventions can be derived from the findings. The impact of the three major categories on adjustment in later life among older women is explained through the three properties of the core category. Assessment of the three properties of meaning within each of the major categories illustrates how searching for meaning affects adjustment in later life. Practitioners could use this framework to assist older women discover which aspects of their lives they are struggling with and where they are

failing to find meaning. Following an assessment of the three properties of meaning within each of the major categories a practitioner would structure a woman's adjustment work and support her to find meaning in her old age. Developing the practitioner's role to use the findings from this thesis would require further work. This work would explore how to formally assess a woman's search for meaning, write a therapeutic plan to carry out the appropriate adjustment work, and evaluate the result of the adjustment work. If Mann's (1995) concept of the redistribution of resources within mental health services for older people takes place perhaps, in the future, nurses will be supporting older women with their adjustment work and search for meaning in later life.

A final area where the work from this study could be explored further is discovering what aspects of adjustment are significant for older men. In this study, the core category of *searching for meaning* explains a process. Therefore, it is hypothesised that if adjustment in later life is explored with older men the process of searching for meaning would be observed. What might be different between older women and older men are the factors which affect adjustment in later life. In a study of adjustment among older men, the interaction of major categories through the three properties of meaning would be observed but the major categories discovered during the analysis might be differ. In addition, the research process adopted for exploring the lives of older women might not be appropriate for exploring the lives of older men because they might reveal their struggles in different ways from women. Among younger adults, the manifestation of emotional and mental difficulties varies between women and men (Mechanic, 1978). There is no reason not to expect that older women's and men's experiences of emotional and mental health differs as it does between younger women and men. A research study of the lives of older men would have to consider this factor and develop appropriate methods for exploring issues of adjustment in later life among older men. It would be interesting to explore these questions further and discover the most significant factors affecting adjustment among older men.

Summary

Practitioners might not be able to change older women's circumstances but supporting them in doing the necessary adjustment work will assist older women to adjust more successfully in later life. Successful adjustment in later life can be experienced despite difficult circumstances and no longer being able to draw on previous emotional and

practical resources. Adjustment does not imply a passive acceptance of circumstances or a neglect of the impact of social factors on an older woman. Recognition of circumstances and discovering a way to adjust to these has the consequence of living an authentic life. An individual chooses how to react to a situation and being able to recognise the interaction between social factors and personal strengths is important. Individuals might choose to overcome the constraints of social factors which impact their lives or they might choose to live within the perceived limits of these constraints. Living an authentic life might not be easy because it requires individuals to do the necessary psychological work to adjust to circumstances within the limits of personal strengths. Older people are as able as any other age group to engage in this process. Stevenson (1989) suggests that those who are reflective might experience an existential depression which has no remedy. This attitude is indicative of the negative stereotypes that older people do not benefit from psychological interventions because of an inability to change their ways of thinking, feeling and acting (Bond & Coleman, 1993). The findings from this study show that although some women struggle in later life others successfully engage in a process of adjustment to find meaning in later life. The current emphasis on Erikson's theory of integrity to understand adjustment in later life in the gerontology literature is challenged here. The work in this thesis provides insight about the process of adjusting in later life : across the three major categories and through the three properties of meaning. In this chapter, there was an account of how the work can be taken forward by practitioners working with older women. This work fits in with Mann's (1995) prediction for future models of non-psychiatric local service provision to promote mental health in older people. Practitioners would provide support for older women struggling to find meaning and failing to experience a successful old age, regardless of whether they were experiencing a diagnosable psychiatric disorder.

In conclusion, the findings from the study presented here illustrate contrasting stories of women who were showing successful adjustment in old age with those of women struggling in later life. The thesis illustrates the significance of ontological questions to adjustment in later life among older women. The analysis revealed that three major categories of *explaining depression; intimacy in the lives of older women; and managing change in later life* are significant to adjustment in later life among older women. The relationship between these major categories is explained by the core category of *searching for meaning* through its three properties of meaning : *context,*

abilities, and *desires*. The interaction between the three major categories through the three properties of meaning addresses the ontological questions which the women face when their lives are turned upside down by the various changes associated with ageing. Those who manage to evaluate the three properties of meaning and carry out appropriate adjustment work enjoy a successful old age. Those who struggle to find meaning and do not do the adjustment work do not enjoy their old age. The ontological questions affect adjustment in later life through context, abilities, and desires. An evaluation of the three properties of meaning across the three major categories structures the adjustment work older women carry out to experience a successful old age.

Appendices

Appendix A

Summarising the Coding and Analysis

Notes for understanding the summary tables

- “Normal type” in the first table indicates a substantive code, which emerged before the theoretical codes were developed, and the name of the label is derived from the participants’ own words.
- “Bold type” in the first table indicates a theoretical code and the name of the label reflects abstract thinking to illustrate a link between a group of substantive codes.
- “IN” indicates that the code originated from interview data.

Substantive and theoretical codes : A summary

| Code | Category Label |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 001 : Explaining Depression | |
| 001(IN) | Explaining depression |
| 001A | Defining / legitimising depression |
| 001A(i) | “Clinical” depression |
| 001A(ii) | Keep your feelings to yourself |
| 001A(iii) | Keep smiling / Pull yourself together |
| 001A(iv) | Looking to others’ experiences to minimise your own feelings |
| 001B(IN) | The effects of a life history |
| 001C(IN) | The state the world’s in |
| 001D(IN) | Physical complaints / hypochondrial behaviour |
| 001E(IN) | Suicidal thoughts |
| 001F(IN) | Feeling no enthusiasm to enjoy activities / things being a bother |
| 001G(IN) | Maintaining / establishing friendships difficult |
| 001H(IN) | A personality trait |
| 001H(i)(IN) | A worrier |

| Code | Category Label |
|---|--|
| 001H(ii)(IN) | Being too sensitive |
| 001H(iii)(IN) | Trouble wi ma nerves |
| 001H(iv)(IN) | Being a perfectionist |
| 001I(IN) | Managing depressive illness |
| 001J(IN) | Hindrances to managing depressive illness |
| 002 : Intimacy in the Lives of Older Women | |
| 002(IN) | Intimacy in the lives of older women |
| 002A(IN) | Lack of a confiding relationship |
| 002A(i) | Don't bother others |
| 002A(ii) | Concealing negative feelings |
| 002A(iii) | Depersonalised telling of experiences |
| 002B | Expressing sexuality |
| 002C | Networks / neighbourhoods |
| 002C(i) | Relationships with family and friends |
| 002C(ii) | Unresolved grudges |
| 002C(iii) | Feeling neglected |
| 002C(iv) | A duty to care |
| 002C(v) | I'm the only one left |
| 002D | The significance of living arrangements |
| 003 : Managing Life Changes in Later Life | |
| 003 | Managing life changes in later life |
| 003A | What are our resources? |
| 003B(IN) | Taking everyday as it comes |
| 003C(IN) | Accepting that life changes and there is nothing you can do to prevent this |
| 003D | What make the challenges of old age difficult? |
| 003D(i)(IN) | It's everything together which is too much |

| Code | Category Label |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 003D(ii)(IN) | Incredible things keep happening |
| 003E(IN) | Expecting death |
| 003F | Physical well-being |
| 003F(i) | Being disabled late in life a sign of old age |
| 003F(ii) | I'll be ** (years) in ** (month) |
| 003F(iii) | Refusing to take someone's arm to walk |
| 003F(iv) | Joking |
| 003F(v) | Disability in old age |
| 003F(vi) | Conversation stopped by deafness |
| 003F(vii) | Not being able to do what you used to be able to do / what you want to be able to do now |
| 003F(viii) | Frightened of what will happen when alone |
| 003F(ix) | Reliance on others for self-care - e.g. home helps |
| 003G | Challenging the cultural realities of old age |
| 003G(i) | We don't want to live in the past |
| 003G(ii) | People treat older people like children |
| 003G(iii) | Being seen as an individual is important |
| 003G(iv) | Does a changing body hide a personality? |
| 003G(v)(IN) | Decisions should not be made for you |
| 004 : Searching for Meaning | |
| 004(IN) | Searching for meaning |
| 004A(IN) | The women try to make sense of their old lives |
| 004A(i)(IN) | Trying to find a reason |
| 004B(IN) | Reminiscence |
| 004C(IN) | The significance of faith |

Methodological notes : A summary

| Code | Category Label |
|---|--|
| 001 : Unquestioning Acceptance of My Presence at the Day Centre | |
| 001 | Unquestioning acceptance of my presence at the day centre |
| 002 : Analysis of the Interview Process | |
| 002(IN) | Questioning and answering |
| 002A(IN) | Interviewer's questioning and prompting |
| 002A(i)(IN) | Missed opportunities for questioning. |
| 002A(ii)(IN) | Too frequent interruptions |
| 002A(iii)(IN) | Closed questions |
| 002A(iv)(IN) | The influence of the sequence of questioning on the way the interview proceeds |
| 002A(v)(IN) | Tape recorder too far away |
| 002B(IN) | Participants' communication style |
| 002B(i)(IN) | Inconsistencies in story line |
| 002B(ii)(IN) | Use of the vernacular |
| 002B(iii)(IN) | Question interpreted by participants differently than expected |
| 002C(IN) | Setting the agenda |
| 003(In) : The Influence of the Interview Process on Participants | |
| 003(IN) | The influence of the interview process on participants |

Appendix B

Extracts of Data

Interactions with Mrs L : March to October

25th March

Mrs L looked a bit withdrawn, never sat still for more than a few minutes. Despite being a “helper” type giving out teas she seems quite uncommunicative - other ladies talked about her unresponsiveness, when she seemed to ignore questions from other people. They said it was due to her deafness [they wanted to explain her ... behaviour].

12th April

Mrs L seems quite anxious. She really busies herself, but without a smile. She continually looks down, but still helps other people constantly, but without looking up.

19th April

Mrs L's mood seemed much brighter today. She was smiling lots and making more eye contact with me and others.

3rd May

Really on top form today. I mentioned her nice hair, and she chatted to me about for a short while about going to the hairdresser's. She was smiling a lot and chatting to the other women about their jewellery.

25th May

Mrs L was in a very good mood, despite her bad health [sore back]. Mrs L looked nice again today. The other ladies admired her clothes.

4th June

In great form again. Still wearing eye shadow.

3rd of July

“I'm just biding my time.”

16th July

Mrs L talked about her depression today, for the first time in front of me. She said that her back was better, but now she had another thing to contend with - her depression. Mrs A then said, "Yes, just as you have adjusted to one thing another happens." Mrs L said she was on tablets for the depression, and also nerve tablets. [Mrs L obviously recognises certain signs that her depression is reoccurring]. [She talked about the depression like a sore leg re-occurring. It is seemed as though it was expected to re-occur. The way she discussed it was as if she knew she just had to wait for it to go away again. She seemed to think there was nothing she could do herself for the depression, except take the tablets.] She said she wanted to do away with herself, but she was too much of a coward. [This would tie in with her previous statements about "biding her time". Towards the end of June, when her back was still giving her much pain, she keep saying, "I'm just biding my time." She said this to many of the other members when they asked how she was doing.]

13th of August

Seems a little quite and low for the past few days.

11th September

She told me that she hates being the house alone at all. She dreads going back after the day centre closes, and only looks forward to coming back again. She said her nerves were really bad just now. She told me about having money stolen.

17th September

She seem in a much better mood today. She is more relaxed, and thoroughly enjoyed the day centre. She helped with the ticket collection and danced a jig with me as well. She was smiling lots and seemed very happy. On one occasion in the afternoon, however, she did seem a little deep in thought.

7th of October

I told Mrs L that I thought she did not look as bad as she had done recently. She said that she did not look as bad, but she was still very nervy. She said that it was still all in her head, and that talking about it was not a "good idea" [my words] She said it was still all "In here." [pointing to her stomach].

Conversations with Jessie : April to October

April 19th

Jessie looked after Bunty in the morning. Played dominoes with other members. Stature quite crippled with arthritis, but she manages to walk tall. Jessie is one of the few women to initiate conversation.

May 3rd

Jessie still in a good mood. She joked all morning because she was sitting in a wobbly chair, and she kept swinging back and forth in the chair.

May 22nd

Jessie is 89 years old. ... Jessie [then] told us about her experiences in hospital. ... She broke her wrist and fractured her leg [... ?hip]. ... I asked her if she had been at the rehabilitation hospital. She said the doctor had asked her to go there, but she had had enough of hospitals. She went and stayed with her daughter instead. Jessie told us that these fractures only occurred after she was 80, when retired from helping at the lunch clubs! Jessie tells Olive she is going through to the dining room. Olive doesn't go. They all laugh, because Iris teases Jessie and Olive about their, usually, joint trip to the toilet before lunch

May 25th

Jessie said hello to me. She was one of the few ladies who was able to walk around the stalls at the coffee morning. She made lots of purchases. I had to help her put them all into a strong carrier bag. When I arrived I sat in the chair she had been sitting in. She soon got me to move. [I remember that on a previous occasion, during the week, at the day centre Jessie got me to move seats because I was sitting in a chair she had previously been sitting in.] Yvonne had a conversation about Bunty. Yvonne said, well she'll be 96 next month. I brought Jessie into the conversation [because I remembered they were friends]. Jessie said, "Oh, I've known Bunty for years." The ladies proceed to have a conversation swapping their ages. Jessie said she was 89 in July, and Yvonne said she was going to be 85 in June.

June 6th

I ask Jessie, "How are you?" Jessie replies, "Not so good. We are up one day and down the next."

June 12th

Jessie was not there on Monday to hear the accordion player, but Iris brought her into the conversation. She said she agreed that the musicians always bring out the same old songs. Jessie actually said, "They think you're senile!"

June 19th

Jessie told me she had been living in the same house for 67 years. It was the house her and her husband had got together. She said they got the house in the June and were married in the November. I asked whether they had lived together. She said, "There was none of that then. There was no sex before marriage." She went onto to say how "green" [her words here] she was when she got married. She said she didn't know what it was all for!

September 11th

Iris and Jessie discuss their age, and say how wonderful Agnes is for her 94 years. Jessie says that she never feels that she is 89 years old. She says not until her fall (when she broke her hip) did she stop doing things. ... She said she doesn't feel her age until she tries to do something. She said that the first time her age struck her was when she got up her ladders last year. She said she was shaking, and now she doesn't do it because, "it's not fair" [on the family]. Iris agreed that it wasn't fair on the family.]

September 27th

Jessie was unwell last Wednesday. I tried to comfort her and she said to me, "Don't give me sympathy." I spoke to her today and asked her how she was. And she began to tell me how she was. She hasn't been sleeping at all recently. I told her that she looked tired, and she said that when she is waking up in the morning her eyes are black and blue. She said it was getting ridiculous, and that she would tell her doctor. She said that she was taking Tamezepam, as she had done for years. But she was waking up at 2am, and getting up at 4am to make a cup of tea. Then she sometimes takes another sleeping pill at four and sleeps. She then went on to tell me she is also constipated, but she is too embarrassed to tell her doctor. She said to me in a low voice, "To tell you the truth it is coming away from me when I'm walking." I asked her if she had a woman doctor, and she said she does, and that wasn't the problem. I gave her some advice about her constipation. I said her porridge in the mornings should help, and she agreed. Then I suggested that she took some prunes on her porridge, or some dark chocolate. She said that sounded a good idea, but she never gets out. And her daughter is on holiday in Malta, "There's my granddaughter," she said. [But she didn't seem to think that was a suitable way of getting prunes.] I suggested that I went and bought some prunes for

her, and she seemed pleased. When she took the prunes she sort of hid them from the other ladies. [It is strange that such a woman who seems to be coping so well has problems when her daughter goes on holiday. She seems to have great family support, but when her daughter goes on holiday everything falls to pieces. I always wondered why she needed the staff to buy her a pint of milk for her. She has said in the past, when I asked how she is, "Not too bad." And sometimes she says, "Better now," explaining that she had been feeling bad recently, but had not mentioned it. Some of these women appear so well, but underneath they are not.

October 11th

Jessie asked how she was doing. She told me that she still can't sleep. She said she was up until 3am today. Mrs E said that things seem worse then, and Jessie said "Yes. It's a very lonely time." She has bags under her eyes as well. [I'm worried about her. Especially after she told me about not having anyone to get her messages when her daughter is away. But her spirits still seem high. She is still joking and laughing, and fussing nicely over the other ladies.]

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- Traynor, V. (1996) *Recruiting participants to a qualitative study* Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the British Society of Gerontology, the University of Liverpool, Sept 1996
- Traynor, V. (1997) *Understanding depression in elderly women: A qualitative study* Paper presented at the World Congress of Gerontology, Adelaide, Australia, Aug 1997
- Traynor, V. (1998) *Intimacy and older women's perceptions of ageing* Poster presentation at the Annual Conference of the British Society of Gerontology, the University of Sheffield, Sept 1998
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